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TRACKING SHARPS' EARLY ACTION

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EDITOR'S LETTER

Call this the year of change in the NFL and college football.

While turnover is always part of the game from one season to the next, 2025 represents a new era. In the NFL, seven new coaches bring renewed hope to down-trodden franchises, as do the new quarterbacks taking over more than a third of the league's starting jobs.

Ben Johnson, one of the smartest offensive minds in football, gets the keys to the Chicago Bears, who suddenly have the look of a contender. Aaron Rodgers is a Pittsburgh Steeler, a signing that could go two very different directions.

And everyone is still chasing the Philadelphia Eagles and Kansas City Chiefs. Some things are slower to change.

The transformation is even more pronounced in college football, where words like portal and NIL have become part of the offseason vernacular, and have complicated the jobs of prognosticators, who now have to rely on projection as much as history.

The new expanded College Football Playoff format has also had a domino effect in how we watch and bet on games.

We're here to sort it all out, to make it make sense for sports bettors and fans alike with *The Spun's 2025 Football Betting Guide*. In it, you'll find NFL and college football betting advice, trends, schedules, statistics and much more, including:

- → Previews of all 32 NFL teams with best bets for each club
- → Breakdowns of every major NFL award
- → Trends to know before placing your wagers
- → Win total projections and best bets
- → Season-long props and futures
- → Staff predictions for division, conference and Super Bowl winners
- → Schedule rankings and NFL power ratings
- → Previews for the Power Four and Group of Five conferences
- → Heisman longshots that could pay off big
- → National title betting tiers
- → College football power rankings and betting trends
- → Best bets to make the CFP outside the Power Four

And if that wasn't enough, we also carved out space to provide the best – and worst – of the football media landscape, including:

- → Rankings of the five best and worst football broadcasters
- → The seven hottest women covering the sport
- → A recap of last year's wildly popular "Most Annoying People in Football Media" won by the incomparable Stephen A. Smith
- → A sneak peek of the 2025 "Most Annoying" bracket with a scannable QR code to vote online

Tighten your chin strap, the season's about to kick off. In the meantime, enjoy this comprehensive preview guide to get you ready for some football in 2025.

VISIT THE SPUN
FOR DAILY UPDATES

Andy Fenelon

Andy Fenelon, Managing Editor

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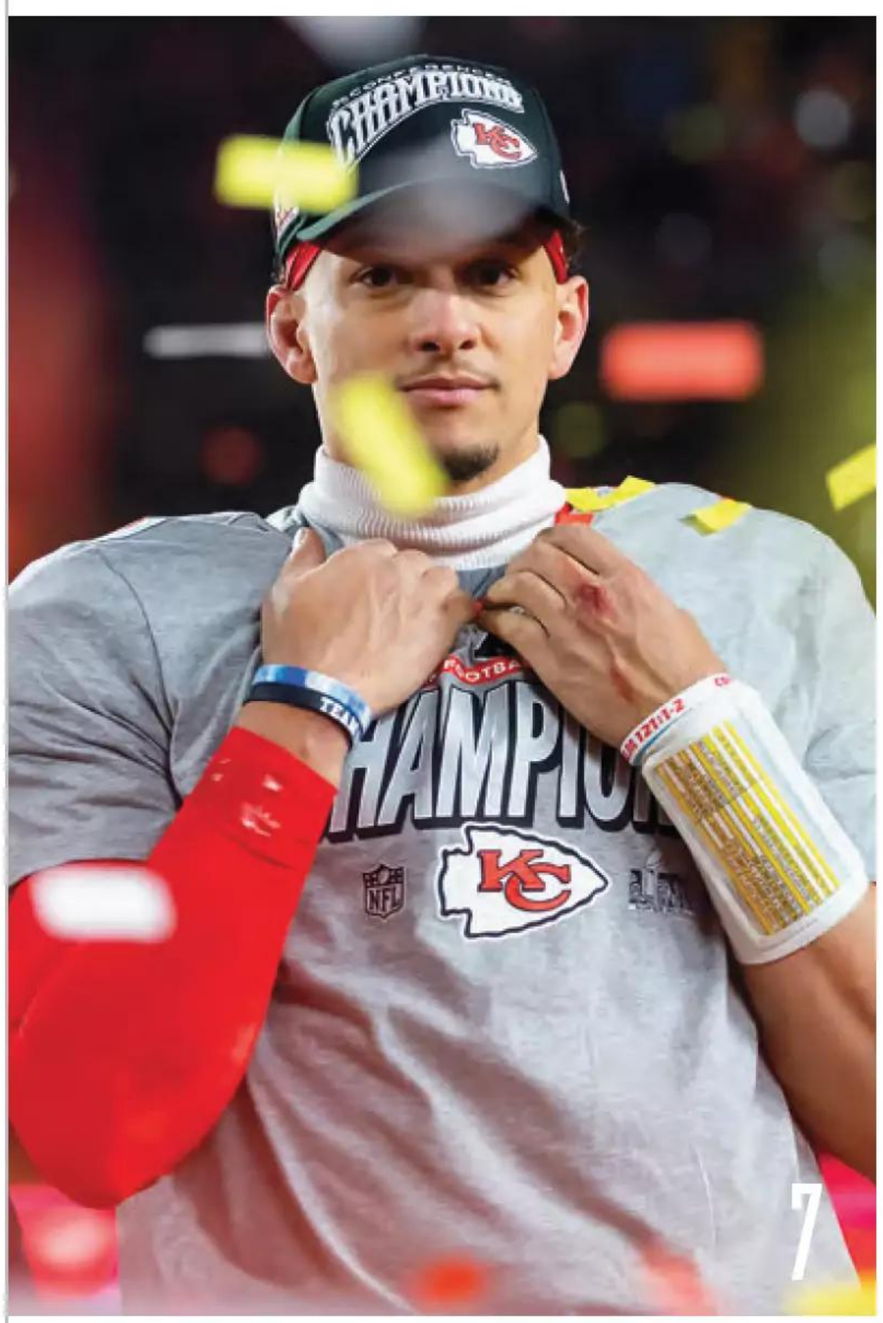

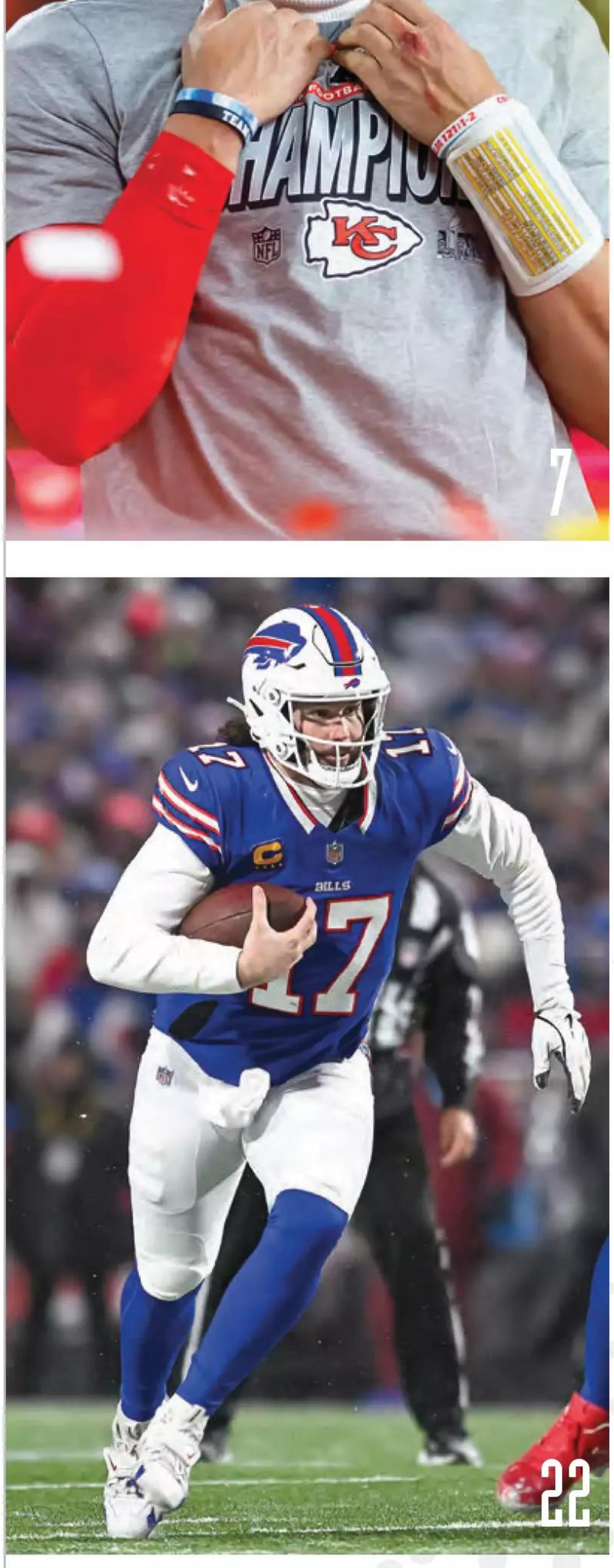

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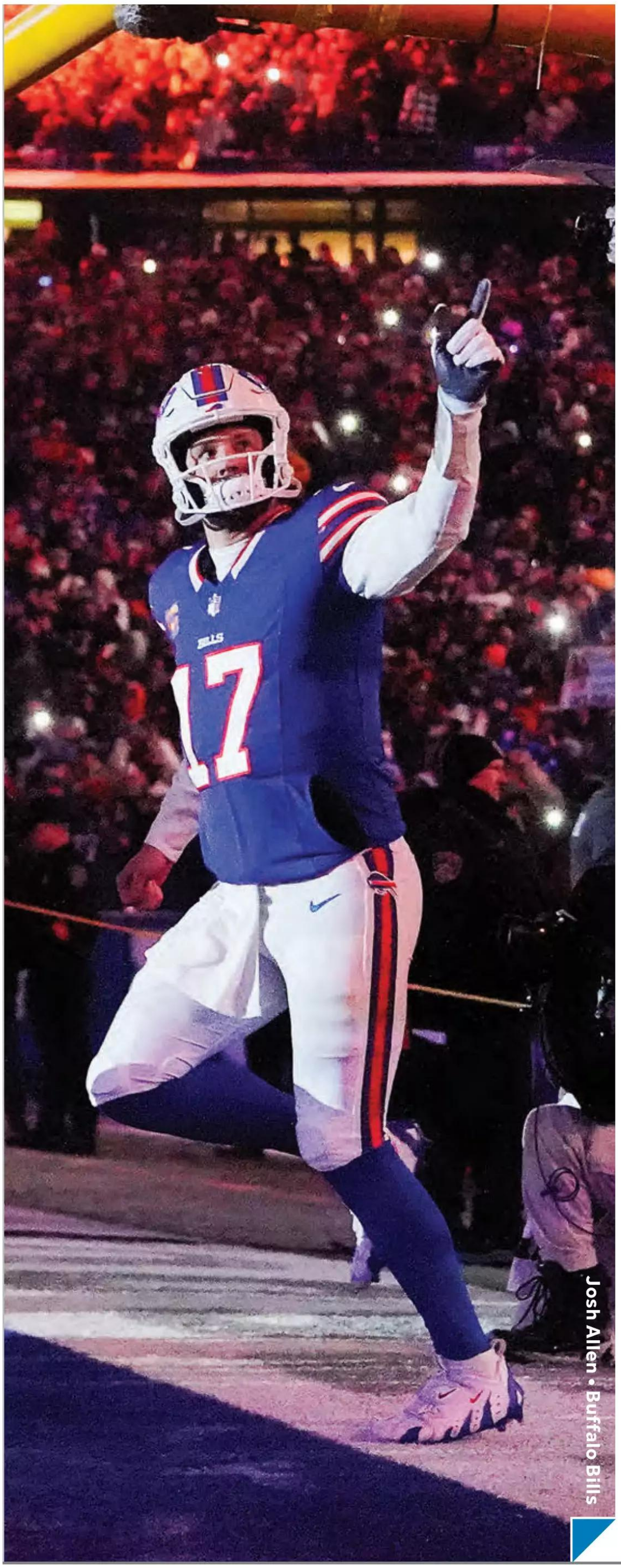

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SUPER BOWL SMART MONEY

BY RYAN REYNOLDS

So who's going to win it all in 2025? It's a question many have been asking since the final seconds ticked off the clock and the Philadelphia Eagles were crowned Super Bowl LIX champions.

Although last year's preseason smart money moved toward the Eagles, they were still the fourth choice at most books when the 2024 season kicked off, behind heavy favorites Kansas City (+400) and San Francisco (+500), as well as Baltimore (+1000).

This time, Philadelphia is either the sole favorite or co-favorite to go back-to-back for the first time in franchise history. The team's preseason consensus Super Bowl price: +650.

That, however, doesn't mean the defending champs are an overwhelming chalk to repeat. In fact, they're among six teams with single-digit Super Bowl odds (shorter than 10/1).

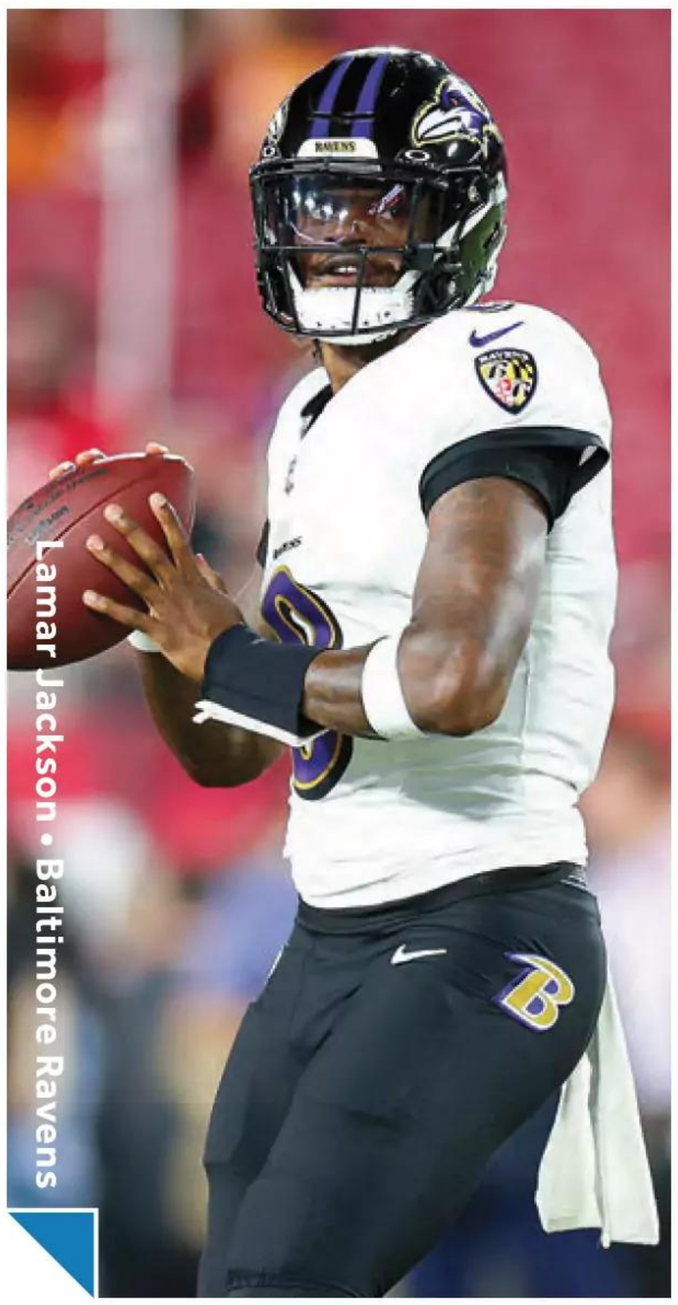
So back to the question: Who will hoist the Lombardi Trophy after Super Bowl LX? Let's tackle it like smart bettors did a year ago — by prioritizing value.

"The best way to find futures value is through regression," says Establish the Run co-founder Adam Levitan, one of the most respected names in DFS and sports betting. "Did an outlier percentage of a team's drives [result in] short field goals instead of touchdowns last season? Has a team's offseason moves, especially with coaching and offensive line play, given us a reason to believe a quarterback can make a leap?"

Like many sharp bettors, Levitan prefers making his futures bets in early awards markets. But the same regression premise can be applied to Super Bowl wagering, as well as other futures markets.

For example, the Chicago Bears (+3500) revamped their offensive line and added the offseason's biggest prize in head coach Ben Johnson. Those moves give quarterback Caleb Williams a clear shot at taking a major leap in 2025. In a best-case scenario, Williams becomes part of the MVP conversation, which in turn makes the Bears a potential title contender.

That sentiment is evident in early NFL championship markets. Example: Chicago is among five teams with the highest Super Bowl ticket counts at FanDuel. The Lions, Bills, Eagles and Commanders are the others. So not only are the Bears well-positioned to take a step forward in 2025, but they're extremely popular among Super Bowl



futures bettors — factors that are driving up their ticket volume (and driving down their price).

When it comes to early Super Bowl handle at FanDuel, the Eagles, Bills, Lions, Chiefs and Ravens lead the way. No surprises there, as those are widely viewed as the top five teams in the league. However, simply betting on the "best" teams isn't the only smart consideration when betting preseason futures.

For instance, the schedule greatly influences when one should place a Super Bowl bet on any of those teams. Baltimore and Kansas City face very tough starts, with more manageable second halves. Therefore, if you like the Ravens (+700) or Chiefs (+850) to win it all, consider waiting to place your wager.

The Bills, on the other hand, kick off the Sunday Night Football schedule against the Ravens. After Baltimore, Buffalo doesn't face another contender until Week 9 (Kansas City). So if you're high on the Bills (+750), bet them before Week 1.

At Circa Sports, widely regarded as the sharpest sportsbook in the country, risk manager Dylan Sullivan says the property is heavy to Philadelphia in Super Bowl tickets, but the most money has come in on Buffalo.

Again, early money in futures markets is often sharp money. Translation: The smart money in 2025 is on the Bills.

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SUPER BOWL LX ODDS

TEAM	ODDS
Buffalo BILLS	+750
Baltimore RAVENS	+750
Philadephia EAGLES	+750
Kansas City CHIEFS	+800
Detroit LIONS	+1000
Los Angeles RAMS	+1900
Cincinnati BENGALS	+1900
Washington COMMANDERS	+2100
Green Bay PACKERS	+2100
Minnesota VIKINGS	+2200
San Francisco 49ERS	+2200
Houston TEXANS	+2500
Los Angeles CHARGERS	+2600
Denver BRONCOS	+2700
Tampa Bay BUCCANEERS	+2700
Chicago BEARS	+3500

TEAM	ODDS
Dallas COWBOYS	+3800
Arizona CARDINALS	+4200
Pittsburgh STEELERS	+4300
New England PATRIOTS	+6000
Atlanta FALCONS	+6000
Seattle SEAHAWKS	+6500
Miami DOLPHINS	+6500
Jacksonville JAGUARS	+8000
Indianapolis COLTS	+8000
Carolina PANTHERS	+11000
Las Vegas RAIDERS	+12000
New York JETS	+22000
Tennessee TITANS	+23000
New York GIANTS	+26000
Cleveland BROWNS	+36000
New Orleans SAINTS	+40000

3 KEY FACTORS WHEN BETTING NFL GAMES

BY DOUG KEZIRIAN

Twenty years ago, well before he became a legendary broadcaster, Howie Long uttered sage words.

"Baseball is America's pastime but football is truly America's passion," Long said during his induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

The NFL is a sportsbook's gold standard, representing the largest house limits and betting handle of any league. Various reasons account for this massive interest but mostly it stems from the limited frequency of games and our familiarity with the players. Recreational bettors believe they understand the product and have all the necessary information.

As the 2025 season approaches, I offer three critical factors when wagering on games:

HOMEFIELD ADVANTAGE IS WIDELY OVERRATED BY RECREATIONAL BETTORS

For decades, the betting market assessed a consensus homefield value at three points, but that has since adjusted to between 0.8 and 1.5 points, based on my conversations with respected bettors.

That's because everyone has learned the value of key numbers, given football's units of scoring with touchdowns and field goals. Between 2000 and 2024, about 15% of games were decided by exactly three points, even as the extra-point distance moved back in 2015. The other common margins of victory are six, seven and 10 points.

Thus, it is impossible to assign a blanket number on any team's home field. So much depends on the actual point spread and how close it falls to the key numbers.

One main reason for this is advanced technology. Quarterbacks now have elite communication devices that allow them to circumvent crowd noise. Plus, private charters also alleviate travel difficulties.

All this has flatlined a team's record at home. In 2024, home teams went 145-127 for a .533 win percentage. The betting market has accounted properly, leveling out with a 134-138-6 ATS record. Recent seasons have similar results. This is where things stand, so do not overreact to a heavily-nuanced variable.

TIME-TESTED SITUATIONAL HANDICAPPING IS AN IMPORTANT TOOL

All bettors must avoid the common mistake of fixating on the most recent game. Teams are never as good or bad as they last played. That's just the nature of human performance, as opposed to the odds of a roulette wheel or slot pull.

While the point spread is considered the great equalizer, betting opportunities still exist, and one must often train themselves to think outside the box.

STAY NIMBLE AND UNATTACHED TO CERTAIN PERCEPTIONS

Simply, teams are allowed to evolve and regress. Adjust accordingly.

For example, respected math modelers influence and shape the betting market. In September, their power ratings still use statistics from the previous season as a baseline. But if a team plays poorly, professional bettors are often stubborn and married to a particular rating.

However, if you notice a misread on a new coach or quarterback, then you can beat the market by acknowledging that inefficiency and betting before the books fully adjust.

Beating the NFL point spread is often considered the hardest element of sports betting. One must incorporate a wide range of tools and wisdom but hopefully these three fundamental tips will help you evolve and avoid common mistakes.

ADOBE STOCK

MVP FAVORITES + Odds

BY DOUG KEZIRIAN

In sports betting, there is a fine line between reckless and savvy longshot wagers. The NFL MVP award has crystallized this concept over the past decade, forcing oddsmakers to evolve and leaving foolish bettors throwing good money after bad bets.

The saga began in 2018, when Patrick Mahomes took the league by storm in his first full season as the Kansas City Chiefs' starting quarterback. The overnight sensation won the MVP, after having odds in the neighborhood of 100/1 the previous summer.

Sure enough, the very next season Lamar Jackson did the exact same thing for the Baltimore Ravens. He, too, began the year with 100/1 odds and ultimately hoisted the award.

This outlier two-year stretch disrupted what had become a predictable trend of established quarterbacks. However, normalcy was promptly restored, as Aaron Rodgers then went back-to-back for his third and fourth MVPs in Green Bay.

But some bettors are still hoping to catch lightning in a similar bottle this season. DraftKings head oddsmaker Johnny Avello has seen significant action on Justin Fields of the New York Jets (200/1) and Shedeur Sanders of the Cleveland Browns (150/1).

FROM LEFT: GARY A. VASQUEZ-IMAGN IMAGES; SCOTT GALVIN-IMAGN IMAGES

2025 PRESEASON NFL MVP ODDS	
Lamar Jackson	+500
Josh Allen	+600
Joe Burrow	+600
Patrick Mahomes	+600
Jayden Daniels	+850
Justin Herbert	+2000
Jalen Hurts	+2000
C.J. Stroud	+2500
Brock Purdy	+2500
Jordan Love	+3100
Jared Goff	+3100
Caleb Williams	+3100
Baker Mayfield	+3400
Dak Prescott	+4000
Matthew Stafford	+4000
Trevor Lawrence	+4000
Kyler Murray	+5000
Saquon Barkley	+5000

"This is all early money and speculation. It's guys with high odds and people taking a shot," Avello said. "They're only taking prices that will be long gone if guys start out well."

I would classify those as reckless wagers and "dead money". Now, I might have said the same thing in 2018 and 2019 about the eventual winners, but at least the industry has evolved since then, forming a tighter market. Oddsmakers have learned a great deal about creating odds for awards, which is very different from generating odds for actual games.

"I used to not like it but it's been really good because the odds have become much more sophisticated than they were in the beginning," said SuperBook VP of Risk Management Ed Salmons, a veteran NFL oddsmaker. "Just following it for the past eight years, it's easier to do now and it's a staple out there. It's definitely something we book every year, and for the most part, we do pretty well with it."

Essentially, oddsmakers have learned from their mistakes with Mahomes and Jackson. No longer will sportsbooks offer such long odds for a quarterback of a potentially high-powered offense. By comparison, QBs with longshot odds entering the 2025 season include Brock Purdy (25/1), Jared Goff (31/1), and Trevor Lawrence (40/1).

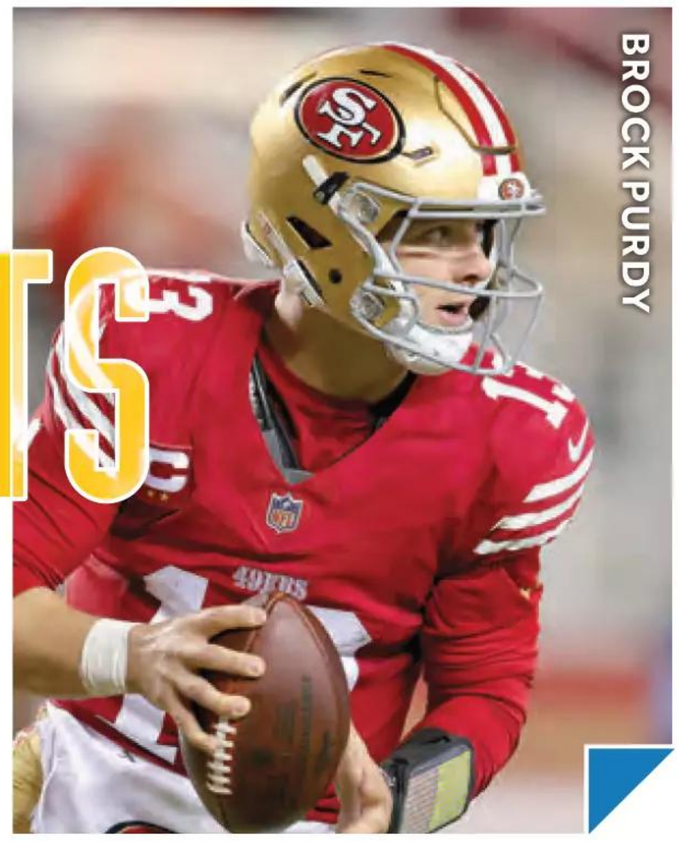
The usual suspects are the betting favorites with Jackson leading the way with consensus +500 odds. Reigning MVP Josh Allen, Joe Burrow and Mahomes are right behind at +600, while Jayden Daniels (+850) has entered the mix in just his second season.

The shortest odds for any non-quarterback is Saquon Barkley with consensus 50/1 odds. He was a finalist last season with 2,005 rushing yards, the eighth-most in NFL history, but ultimately a quarterback won the MVP for the 12th straight year.

Salmons firmly believes a quarterback will win MVP for the rest of time, given how pass-happy the NFL has become over the years. "All leagues have gravitated toward the same stuff. A kicker (Mark Moseley) won in 1982. Can you imagine a kicker winning MVP right now?"

MVP LONGSHOTS

BY RYAN REYNOLDS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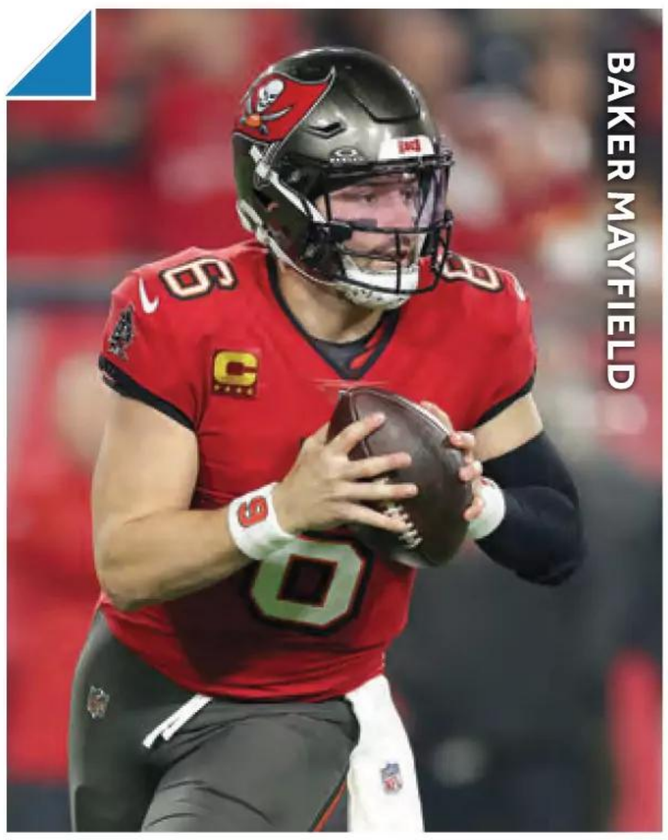
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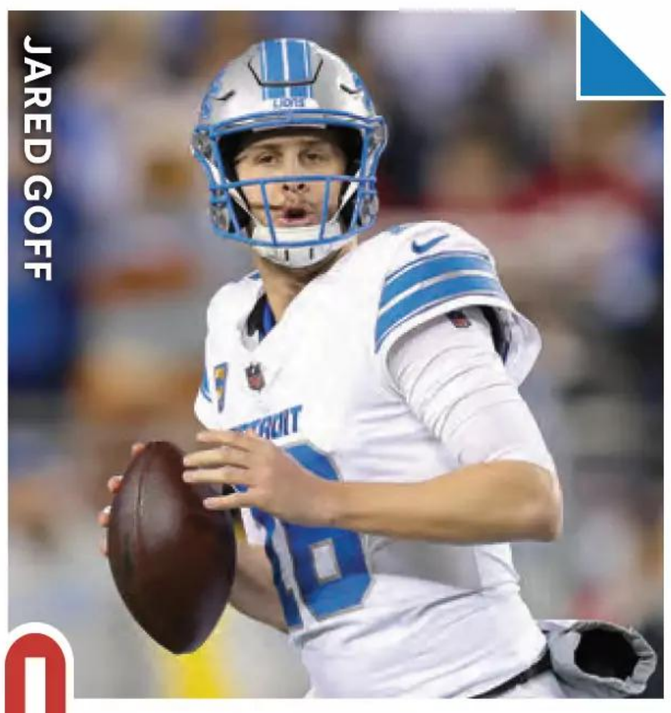

JARED GOFF

An important thing to understand when betting in an awards market: It doesn't matter who you think will win; it only matters who voters are most likely to support.

And in the case of the NFL MVP, history indicates those voters most likely will back a quarterback.

Not only have quarterbacks won 70% of NFL MVP awards, but they've taken home the hardware 17 times in the last 18 seasons — including 12 years in a row.

So when considering an MVP wager on a quarterback, ask yourself two questions: Can his team win its conference, and can he lead the league in touchdowns? You should be able to answer "yes" to at least one of those questions before making any MVP bet.

When it comes to MVP longshots for 2025, your best bets are NFC quarterbacks. For an AFC longshot to win, he and his team would have to outperform Lamar Jackson, Josh Allen, Patrick Mahomes, and Joe Burrow. That's a daunting task.

Therefore, it's far easier to emerge as the top quarterback on the best team in the NFC.

With that said, here are four dark-horse candidates to win the NFL's MVP this season:

BROCK PURDY +2500

The 49ers seriously regressed in 2024. The year prior, though, Brock Purdy was neck and neck with Baltimore's Lamar Jackson in the MVP race heading into their Week 16 head-to-head tilt.

Purdy imploded that night, throwing four interceptions in a 33-19 home loss. However, he's shown that he can play at an MVP level — a reason the 49ers gave him a $256 million extension in the offseason.

San Francisco will enjoy the league's easiest schedule this season, which means it conceivably could contend for the top spot in the NFC. Which makes Purdy an intriguing MVP longshot bet.

JARED GOFF +3100

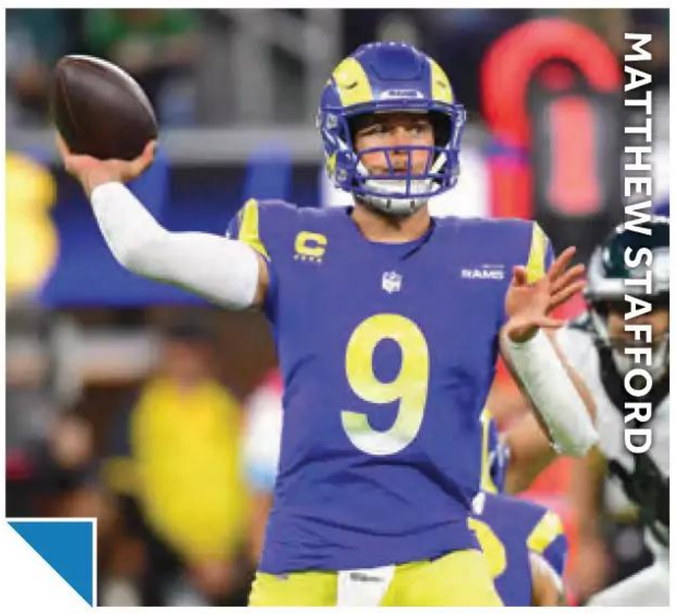
Detroit Jared Goff has joined the ranks of elite NFL passers. The problem with his 2025 MVP candidacy? His team's schedule, especially in the first half of the season. Seven of Detroit's first 10 opponents made the playoffs in 2024. The Lions also face the (seemingly improved) Bears and Bengals during that stretch, giving them nine contests against playoff-caliber teams through Week 11.

Now you know why Goff's MVP price is higher than Purdy's: The latter has a much easier path to MVP contention.

J.J. McCARTHY

BAKER MAYFIELD +3400

Baker Mayfield has posted numbers similar to Goff the last two seasons. However, the Tampa Bay quarterback has a much easier 2025 schedule — in large part because the NFC South is arguably the NFL's weakest division, while the NFC North is the toughest.


MATTHEW STAFFORD

MATTHEW STAFFORD +4000

The Rams' Matthew Stafford is getting up there in age, but it's not inconceivable that he could lead the league in touchdown passes this year — especially with a wide receiver corps headlined by a healthy Puka Nacua and veteran Davante Adams, who is an upgrade over Cooper Kupp.

J.J. McCARTHY +7500

The Vikings' J.J. McCarthy is a Hail Mary MVP longshot. Remember, though, head coach Kevin O'Connell's not only resurrected Sam Darnold in 2024, he got 14 wins and an MVP-quality season out of the former No. 1 pick. McCarthy, who missed all of last season with a knee injury, takes over a loaded offense. Also, his coach is one of the league's best play-callers. In other words, McCarthy has the potential to put up huge numbers for a legit playoff contender.

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OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

By Michael Leboff

TRAVIS HUNTER isn't just an anomaly, he's a unicorn.

Drafted No. 2 overall by the Jacksonville Jaguars, last year's Heisman Trophy winner is the NFL's first true two-way player in generations.

Of course, others have dabbled on both sides of the ball (think J.J. Watt, Mike Vrabel, and Troy Brown). However, Hunter's dual-threat impact is expected to reach a completely different level.

He is the most exciting multifaceted prospect since his college coach, Deion Sanders, turned heads as a perennial All-Pro cornerback and punt returner who also hauled in 60 receptions during a Hall of Fame career.

If you believe oddsmakers, though, Hunter should surpass his old coach without much fuss. In fact, bookies clearly believe Hunter has an outside chance to become the first player to win both Offensive and Defensive Rookie of the Year in the same season.

Hunter currently has the third-shortest odds to win OROY (+900) and DROY (+1000) at nearly identical odds.

Las Vegas Raiders running back Ashton Jeanty (+250) is the chalk to be named Offensive Rookie of the Year, while New York Giants edge rusher Abdul Carter (+250) is the favorite on defense.

So, what are the chances Hunter wins both, either or neither award?

When you convert Hunter's OROY and DROY odds to implied probability, you get 10% and 9.09%, respectively. Add the two together, and that's 19.09%. It's not foolproof math because of the vig, but it paints a clear picture: There's about a 1-in-5 chance Hunter walks away with one award.

That, of course, is the statistical likelihood. What about how this plays out on the field?

It's extremely unlikely Hunter wins both awards. If he's playing well enough on one side of the ball, the Jaguars probably will want him focusing his attention there.

Yes, Hunter showed last season at Colorado that he can handle the two-way workload. But that was in college — and in the watered-down Big 12, which no longer features heavyweights like Texas and Oklahoma. It will be a completely different ballgame for Hunter on Sundays, especially since he'll be a lone wolf playing significant snaps on both sides of the ball.

Now, if you're someone who dabbles in sports betting purely for entertainment purposes — which is perfectly fine — then have at it and fire on Hunter to win the "Rookie of the Year Double." Looking at this practically, though, it appears Hunter's best path to top rookie honors is on offense.

He's joining a team that is desperate for a playmaker to help take some pressure off quarterback Trevor Lawrence, who has not had it easy since joining the NFL. The fifth-year pro has yet to have a teammate with Hunter's upside at his disposal, so this could be the dawn of a new dynamic 1-2 punch in the league.

Plus, if Hunter does put up big numbers on offense while still having an impact on defense, that should only impress voters more.

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OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR ODDS + BEST BETS

By Michael Arinze

PATRICK MAHOMES

JA'MARR CHASE

The criteria for selecting the NFL's Offensive Player of the Year has been relatively straightforward since its inception in 1972. Voters have simply selected the offensive player who produced the most outstanding individual season.

This distinction is clear from that of Most Valuable Player, which essentially translates to the most indispensable player of the year.

Although the MVP has traditionally gone to quarterbacks (particularly in the last two decades), QBs haven't been nearly as dominant in Offensive Player of the Year tabulations. By comparison, quarterbacks have won nearly 70% of all MVPs, but they've still taken home the OPOY hardware 52.8% of the time.

Nothing in the voting framework prevents a candidate from winning OPOY and MVP in the same year (it's occurred 26 times). Therefore, wagering on the OPOY is a bit trickier. That's why the best strategy is to identify players who offer the most betting value.

With that in mind, here are my two best bets to win the top offensive player award in 2025:

PATRICK MAHOMES +7500

You don't often see Kansas City's Patrick Mahomes have 75-to-1 odds in any futures market.

Of course, you also don't often see Mahomes coming off a disappointing season (by his standards). That is indeed the case, though.

Then again, that disappointment in 2024 was mostly the result of persistent injuries to Mahomes' wide receiving group.

Projected starters Hollywood Brown and Rashee Rice didn't share a single regular-season snap together. The former injured his shoulder on his first play during a preseason scrimmage and was sidelined until Week 16, while the latter suffered a season-ending knee injury in Week 4.

If the Chiefs can have some positive injury luck at wide receiver in 2025, there's no reason Mahomes can't return to the form that resulted in two MVP awards and three Super Bowl titles. And at his 80/1 preseason price, the value is tremendous.

JA'MARR CHASE +900

In 2024, Eagles running back Saquon Barkley became just the ninth player to reach the 2,000-yard rushing mark. Such a rare feat virtually guaranteed Barkley the OPOY trophy.

If not for Barkley's historic campaign, Cincinnati's Ja'Marr Chase would've won the award. The veteran wideout finished runner-up to Barkley despite winning the wide receiver triple crown: He led the NFL in receptions (127), yards (1,708) and touchdowns (17).

One reason Chase put up those numbers (and continued to build on his rapport with quarterback and former LSU teammate Joe Burrow): He was on the field for all 17 games.

In fact, Chase has only missed six games since entering the league in 2021. That availability makes him a viable candidate for this honor.

While the Bengals did well to lock up Chase and fellow wide receiver Tee Higgins with new deals, the prevailing opinion is the team didn't do enough to shore up its many defensive deficiencies.

As a result, Cincinnati might need to once again rely heavily on its offense — and in particular the Burrow/Chase partnership — to have any chance for success in 2025.

2025 OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR ODDS

PLAYER	TEAM	ODDS
Saquon Barkley	Eagles	+550
Ja'Marr Chase	Bengals	+900
Jahmyr Gibbs	Lions	+1300
Derrick Henry	Ravens	+1400
Justin Jefferson	Vikings	+1400
Nico Collins	Texans	+1400
Puka Nacua	Rams	+1600
CeeDee Lamb	Cowboys	+1800
Bijan Robinson	Falcons	+2000
Christian McCaffrey	49ers	+2500
Amon-Ra St. Brown	Lions	+2800
Tyreek Hill	Dolphins	+3500
Malik Nabers	Giants	+3500
Brian Thomas Jr.	Jaguars	+4000
Drake London	Falcons	+4000
Jonathan Taylor	Colts	+4000
De'Von Achane	Dolphins	+4000
A.J. Brown	Eagles	+4000

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DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR

ODDS + BEST BETS

By Michael Arinze

NIK BONITTO

Patrick Surtain's NFL Defensive Player of the Year triumph last season is yet another example of how bettors can win big in the futures market.

The Broncos' cornerback opened with odds as high as 155/1, and that number climbed to 227/1 after Week 3. By Week 4, Surtain's price dropped to 30/1, and he didn't become a favorite until the final week when the market was still available on the board.

Surtain, however, needed some things to break in his favor to win the honor — most notably a season-ending leg injury to Detroit sack specialist Aidan Hutchinson in Week 5.

As deserving as Surtain might've been by season's end, sometimes it's better to be lucky than good. After all, Hutchinson was on pace to obliterate the NFL sacks record (22.5) after racking up 7.5 before the injury.

After analyzing the offseason player movement throughout the league, there's a good chance the Broncos once again will field one of the NFL's top defenses.

However, Surtain could face DOPY competition from within his own locker room. With that in mind, here are my two best bets for the NFL's top defender in 2025 heading into the preseason:

NIK BONITTO +4000

Adding two 49ers free agents — linebacker Dre Greenlaw and safety Talanoa Hufanga — will only strengthen a Broncos defense that was already elite. Denver also drafted Texas cornerback Jahdae Barron in the first round to partner with Surtain in the secondary.

AIDAN HUTCHINSON

With the defense poised to replicate its performance from a season ago, targeting a Broncos defender to win NFL Defensive Player of the Year for a second straight season might make sense. It also might make sense to avoid Surtain due to potential voter fatigue.

That brings us to Nik Bonitto, a second-team All-Pro selection who posted a team-high 13.5 sacks last year after having eight in 2023.

Bonitto finished in the top 10 in 2024 DPOY voting, and with the Oklahoma product entering the final year of his rookie deal, he'll be plenty motivated to ball out. Just imagine if he can plop a 2025 NFL DPOY trophy on the negotiating table next offseason.

AIDAN HUTCHINSON +900

We will never know if Aidan Hutchinson would've won the DPOY in 2024 had he not gotten injured. What is clear is that the Lions desperately lacked a suitable replacement who could match his production.

Despite missing the final 12 regular-season games, Hutchinson's 7.5 sacks were almost twice as many as anyone else on the team.

He was the first defender last year to register 45 or more pressures; he received a grade of 90.0 or better from Pro Football Focus for the first five weeks; and his pass rush win rate of 38.3% was almost 11 percentage points better than the rest of the league at the time of his injury.

The dropoff from Hutchinson to a replacement-level player is so significant that voters would have to be blind to undersell his value.

Hutchinson should benefit from the continuity of Detroit's defensive line, as Alim McNeill, D.J. Reader and Marcus Davenport also return for another season. So, as long as he stays healthy, Hutchinson's +900 DPOY odds offer sensational value.

2025 DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR ODDS

PLAYER	TEAM	ODDS
Micah Parsons	Cowboys	+650
Myles Garrett	Browns	+700
Aidan Hutchinson	Lions	+900
T.J. Watt	Steelers	+900
Maxx Crosby	Raiders	+1200
Will Anderson Jr.	Texans	+1300
Jared Verse	Rams	+1500
Nick Bosa	49ers	+1600
Trey Hendrickson	Bengals	+2200
Jalen Carter	Eagles	+3300
Patrick Surtain	Broncos	+3300
Nik Bonitto	Broncos	+4000
Chris Jones	Chiefs	+4000
Kyle Hamilton	Ravens	+5000
Dexter Lawrence	Giants	+5000
Josh Hines-Allen	Jaguars	+5000
Danielle Hunter	Texans	+5500
Derek Stingley Jr.	Texans	+6000

FROM LEFT: JVINCENT CARCHIETTA-IMAGN IMAGES; KEVIN JAIRAJ-IMAGN IMAGES

NFL Comeback Award

BY SEAN TREPPEDI

Aidan Hutchinson

There has perhaps been no greater ambiguity in the modern sports awards era than the NFL's Comeback Player of the Year. Its malleable criteria tailors itself to whatever personal narratives emerge each year, so comparing candidates is always an apples-to-oranges conversation.

Case in point: Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin was the market favorite in 2023 after returning to the active roster despite suffering cardiac arrest on the field the previous season. Hamlin recorded only two combined tackles in 2023, but the emotional pull of his return gained oddsmakers' attention — until a 39-year-old Joe Flacco led the Cleveland Browns to a remarkable playoff crusade in the season's eleventh hour.

The veteran signal caller would garner 151 votes to Hamlin's 140.

According to the Associated Press' subsequent clarification on the award's criteria, Hamlin was robbed. Before the 2024 season, the AP defined the recipient as one who has "overcome illness, physical injury, or other circumstances that led him to miss playing time the previous season."

This has made making a preseason investment in the elusive futures market a bit more rational, but we're left evaluating which season-ending tragedies among popular players were most gruesome.

Joe Burrow won his second Comeback Player of the Year Award in 2024 following wrist surgery that capped his 2023 season after 11 weeks.

Here's where Flacco meets Hamlin in Burrow's case: The Bengals quarterback had a sensational season, leading the NFL with 4,918 passing yards and 43 touchdown passes. Oddsmakers view the comeback award as the MVP among each season's exclusive pool of rehabilitated stars. The narratives and player prominence are already there — it's breaking down who can make the biggest impact.

Dak Prescott

That's why I have my eye on Lions defensive end Aidan Hutchinson and Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott.

Hutchinson, who opened in the spring as the +250 market favorite, is projected to be ready for training camp after enduring a broken leg six weeks into 2024. Detroit's defense was inundated with injuries down the stretch in Hutchinson's absence, yet the Lions still secured the No. 1 seed and an NFC Championship appearance. With a new defensive coordinator and a Super Bowl window at stake, Hutchinson's personal narrative conveniently coincides with Dan Campbell's plight for a franchise-first title.

Prescott, who opened with the third-shortest odds behind Hutchinson and 49ers running back Christian McCaffrey, has led a career charged with adversity: personal matters, contract disputes and two season-ending injuries, including a partial hamstring avulsion that ended his 2024 season 10 games early. All of this under the scrutiny of being the franchise quarterback of "America's Team," which sets the stage for Year 10 in Dallas, where Prescott has still yet to lead the Cowboys to an NFC Championship.

If Prescott stays healthy and leads the Cowboys back to the playoffs in a cut-throat NFC East climate, he will be the politically correct choice for Comeback Player of the Yaer. Let's not forget, this award has become a quarterback's campaign; a signal caller has won it in each of the last seven seasons.

2025 NFL COMEBACK PLAYER OF THE YEAR ODDS	
Dak Prescott	+300
Aidan Hutchinson	+320
Christian McCaffrey	+370
Trevor Lawrence	+450
J.J. McCarthy	+850
Rashee Rice	+1400
Maxx Crosby	+2000
Tua Tagovailoa	+2000

FROM LEFT: KEVIN JAIRAJ-IMAGN IMAGES; DALE ZANINE-IMAGN IMAGES

Mike Vrabel

Ben Johnson

Coach of the Year

BY RYAN REYNOLDS

NFL Coach of the Year (COY) is an "exceeds expectations" award that requires one of two unofficial conditions to be met.

The first, and most common, is for a non-playoff team from the previous year significantly improving while making the postseason. Last year's winner, Kevin O'Connell, is a prime example of what a COY campaign looks like, as his Vikings finished 14-3 after finishing 7-10 in 2023. It was an outcome few outside of Minnesota could have imagined.

The other condition is when a team overcomes a tremendous amount of adversity, most commonly an abnormal rash of injuries. In 2021, Mike Vrabel won COY despite Tennessee finishing 11-5 and winning the AFC South the previous year. Eleven wins usually eliminates coaches from COY contention the following year. However, the 12-5 Titans nabbed the top seed in the AFC, despite setting an NFL record for players fielded in a season (91); they surpassed the previous mark with seven weeks left in the season.

Without the luxury of a crystal ball, we can't bet on teams to overcome injuries, but we can look at coaches of non-playoff teams that have a path to the postseason this year. Here are four we're eyeing in the preseason:

MIKE VRABEL, PATRIOTS (+750)

Vrabel is among the 2025 COY favorites with +750 odds on FanDuel. That's not a great price, but the Patriots open the season with a soft schedule: vs. Las Vegas, at Miami, vs. Pittsburgh and vs. Carolina before a Sunday night trip to Buffalo in Week 5. If Vrabel wins his second COY, a 3-1 start might be a requirement. If you're going to bet him, do it now before his odds likely get shorter in the first quarter of the season.

2025 NFL COACH OF THE YEAR ODDS

COACH	TEAM	ODDS
Ben Johnson	Chicago	+650
Mike Vrabel	New England	+750
Liam Coen	Jacksonville	+1000
Aaron Glenn	N.Y. Jets	+1000
Mike Macdonald	Seattle	+1300
Pete Carroll	Las Vegas	+1400
Dave Canales	Carolina	+1400
Kyle Shanahan	San Francisco	+2000
Jim Harbaugh	L.A. Chargers	+2000
Jonathan Gannon	Arizona	+2000
Dan Campbell	Detroit	+2200
Sean Payton	Denver	+2500
Brian Schottenheimer	Dallas	+2500
Shane Steichen	Indianapolis	+2500
Matt LeFleur	Green Bay	+2500
Brian Callahan	Tennessee	+3000

BEN JOHNSON, BEARS (+650)

Johnson is the favorite in this race. The former Lions offensive coordinator inherits a playoff-caliber roster in Chicago. Like Vrabel, he's a traditional COY contender taking over a struggling team that's positioned to improve. However, the NFC North is arguably the league's best division, and there is no real value in betting Johnson now at his current price. However, Chicago opens the season against Minnesota and Detroit, so there might be opportunities to get Johnson at better odds heading into Week 3.

LIAM COEN, JAGUARS (+1000) AND DAVE CANALES, PANTHERS (+1400)

Coen and Canales both have former No. 1 overall picks at quarterback and are in very winnable divisions. Making things interesting is the fact their teams face each other on opening day. The Week 1 winner will likely have COY odds below 10/1 heading into Week 2.

BRIAN CALLAHAN, TITANS (+3000)

Callahan has the longest odds of any traditional COY candidate with a realistic path to victory. Like Jacksonville, Tennessee isn't drawing dead at a division title in the weak AFC South. However, if you're going to bet on Callahan, you may want to wait until Week 3, as the Titans open at Denver before hosting the Rams in Week 2. Tennessee's schedule gets much softer from there, where Callahan's COY odds could significantly dip if the Titans start 0-2 as expected.

FROM LEFT: ERIC CANHA-IMAGN IMAGES; KAMIL KRZACZYNSKI-IMAGN IMAGES

5 TRENDS: NFL Win Totals

BY MATT JACOB

Jim Harbaugh

Roster additions and subtractions. Coaching and player changes. Strength of schedule. Betting odds. All of those are critical factors when handicapping NFL win total wagers.

Another research tool that sometimes gets overlooked when it comes to win totals? Historical trends.

No, trends aren't the be-all, end-all. Nor do they rank at the top of the handicapping checklist. However, they certainly can be a useful addition to the overall equation.

With that in mind, here are five eye-popping NFL win total trends going into the 2025 season:

THE 'MIKE TOMLIN FACTOR'

The Steelers have never posted a losing record in Mike Tomlin's 18 seasons as head coach. Throw in the final three seasons of previous coach Bill Cowher's tenure, and the streak stretches to 21.

Mike Tomlin

So it should come as zero surprise that those who have consistently wagered on Pittsburgh to beat its win-total projection the past two decades have cleaned up. Actually, they've been cleaning up for nearly four decades, as the Steelers are 25-12-1 to the Over since 1989 — including 13-5 under Tomlin, 9-2 since 2014 and 5-0 in this decade.

Pittsburgh has exceeded eight victories 17 times in the last 21 seasons (and the four other times landed right on eight). **Best bet: Steelers OVER 8.5 (+110)**

ALL BITE, NO BARK

In 25 seasons since the Browns relaunched in 1999, they have cleared their win total just eight times. Things have been particularly bleak since 2003, with Cleveland going 16-6 to the Under.

On the bright side, the Browns have topped 5.5 wins in six of the last seven seasons. The lone exception: 2024, when they finished 3-14. **Best bet: Browns UNDER 5.5 (-150)**

POWER OUTAGE

It only took one season for Jim Harbaugh to reverse an ugly trend that saw the Chargers fail to beat their win total five consecutive times. Even with last year's 11-6 record, the Bolts will lug a 10-5 Under streak into this season.

To improve on that dismal mark, this perennially underachieving franchise must reach double-digit victories for a second straight year — something it accomplished only once since 1982. Overall, the Chargers have won 10 or more games just three times since 1994. **Best bet: Chargers UNDER 9.5 (-115)**

GIANT UNDERACHIEVERS

When the Giants won Super Bowl XLVI in 2011, they actually fell short of their 9.5 win total (finishing 9-7). That kickstarted an ongoing 11-2-1 Under skid.

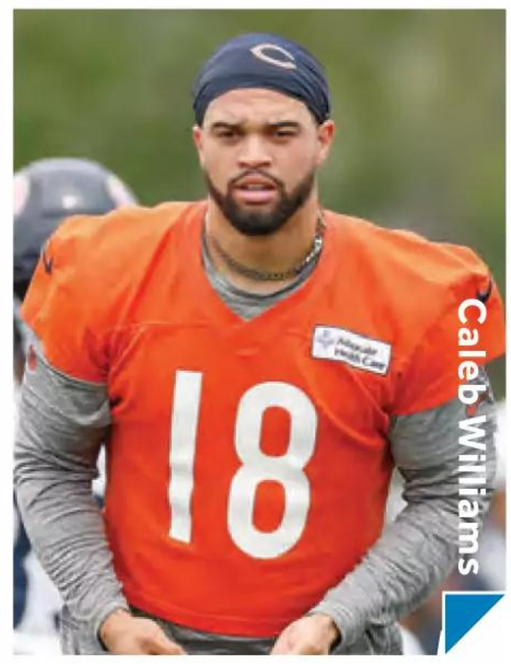
Jaxson Dart

The good news for the G-Men: They've hurdled five victories nine times in those 14 years. The bad news: They've done it just three times since 2017 — and barely on two occasions (6-10 in 2020, 6-11 in 2023). **Best bet: Giants UNDER 5.5 (-145)**

IMPOSTERS OF THE MIDWAY

The Chicago Bears revamped their roster and coaching staff in the offseason, which is why optimism abounds in the Windy City. Unfortunately, history suggests that optimism should be guarded.

That's because the Bears have posted more than eight victories just once in the last 11 years (12-4 in 2018). What's more, since 1996, Chicago is 20-8-1 to the Under (including 5-0-1 since 2019). **Best bet: Bears UNDER 8.5 (-155)**


Caleb Williams

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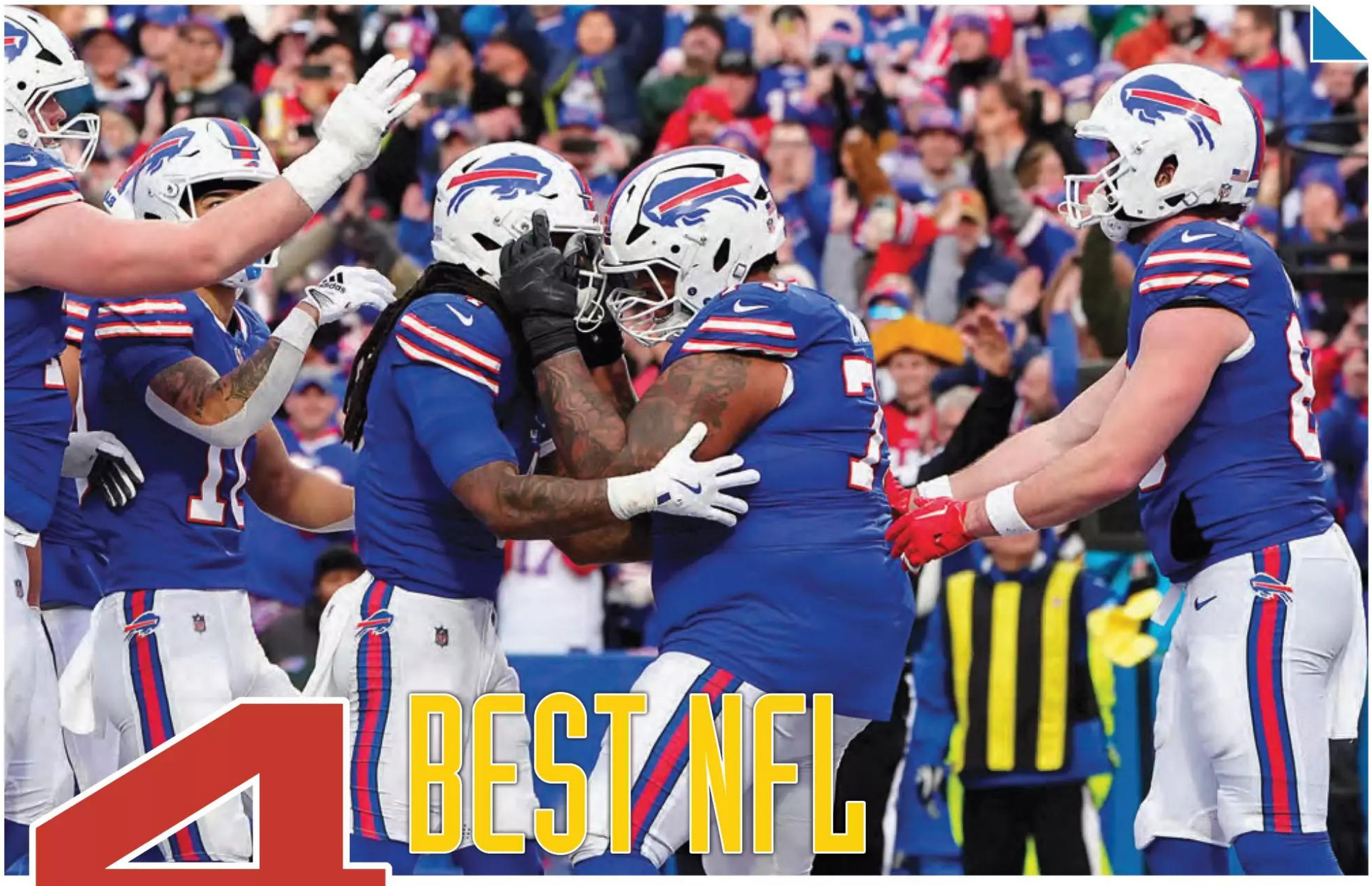


4 BEST NFL WIN-TOTAL BETS

BY RYAN REYNOLDS

Picking every preseason win total is a great exercise that plays a big role in how a bettor values each NFL team. However, we need to be selective when betting in this market because the wagers require tying up money for months.

We are not looking to win over/under bets by the skin of our teeth. Instead, we want options that can win with distance when they hit and, conversely, will also miss small if they lose. That's the way to bet win totals.

We found four win-total bets that meet these conditions in 2025:

BILLS OVER 11.5 WINS (-160)

Buffalo has won the AFC East five years running, winning at least 11 games each season. They went over this number three times during the span, winning 13 games in each instance. As long as Josh Allen stays healthy, the Bills have the miss-small floor we are looking for, while proving they can beat this line by margin.

Making 2025 even more appealing is the fact that Buffalo has the fifth-easiest schedule in the league, giving the team a major advantage over the NFL's other top contenders.

VIKINGS OVER 8.5 WINS (-135)

The Vikings, with uncertainty at quarterback, are a prime negative regression candidate that went 8-1 in one-score games last season. Despite those significant negatives, several factors make Minnesota an intriguing Over option in 2025.

The first is their premium coaching, led by Kevin O'Connell who has built a staff that gives Minnesota a tremendous foundation and a built-in advantage over nearly every NFL team.

The Vikings are also one of few playoff teams that significantly improved their roster in the offseason. They paid Johnathan Allen and Javon Hargrave a combined $90 million to beef up the interior of their defensive line. On offense, they signed guard Will Fries and center Ryan Kelly.

Even if they regress with J.J. McCarthy at quarterback, they could lose five more games than they did last year and still go over this number.

PACKERS UNDER 9.5 WINS (-125)

Green Bay did not improve its roster in the offseason, while every other team in the loaded NFC North did. So, with a stagnant roster in an ascending division – along with the league's 10th-toughest schedule, the Packers look like a team with a 10-win ceiling, with a last place division finish as a floor.

As with all bets, make sure to shop around for the best price; This one in particular can be had as low as -110 on the market.

COLTS UNDER 7.5 (-110)

The Colts' strength in 2024 was their offensive line, but the group has been diminished with the losses of Kelly and Fries. That's not ideal considering how unsettled the quarterback situation is with Anthony Richardson battling Daniel Jones for the job.

Richardson has only played 15 games through his first two seasons and had a horrifying 47.7 completion percentage over 11 contests last year. And Jones is on the Mitch Trubisky career path.

Overall, Indianapolis is a middling team that bled talent and might not have an NFL-caliber quarterback on its roster. Let's bet against that.

GREGORY FISHER-IMAGN IMAGES

Bankroll Management LINE SHOPPING

BY RYAN REYNOLDS

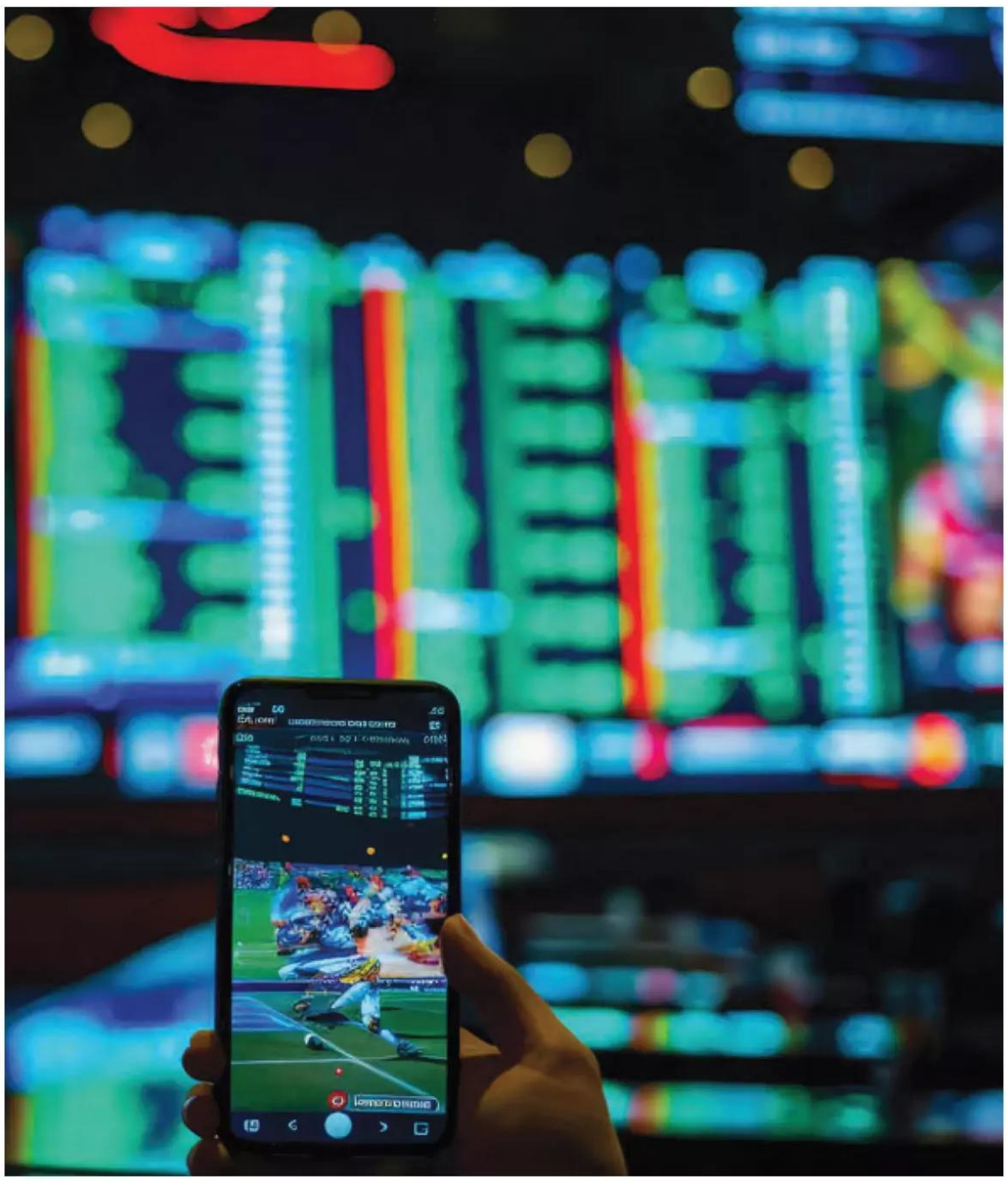
We're all here to add winning insights to our arsenal, but bankroll management and line shopping are the two most important aspects of sports betting.

If you have no plan or discipline with your money, or you stick to only one or two sportsbooks, your chances of achieving long-term success are near zero.

Let's take a look at some best practices in bankroll management and line shopping.

NEVER BET MONEY YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE

This is the first rule in bankroll management, and the most critical. Once you've created an affordable betting budget, set a usage timeframe for the allotted amount. Monthly, through the football season, or a full calendar year are strong considerations. A longer time frame will force you to spread out your betting volume. Summed up, set a budget you can afford to lose and don't add more funds to it through the duration of the set timeframe.



ADOBE STOCK

DETERMINE YOUR BET SIZE

Now that you've set your budget, break it down into smaller units that can be wagered within a consistent framework. The most common and easiest way to determine unit size is 1% of your bankroll makes one unit. In other words, if your bankroll is $1,000, one unit would be $10. No bets should exceed five units, while most wagers should be two units or fewer.

There are a few ways to determine bet size, but the flat model is great for beginners, while still being a viable approach for seasoned bettors. The flat model involves betting the same amount on every wager, making it the easiest to track and maintain. A novice bettor should start by using the flat model to place one unit on every wager.

FORBID CHASING LOSSES OR OVEREXTENDING WINS

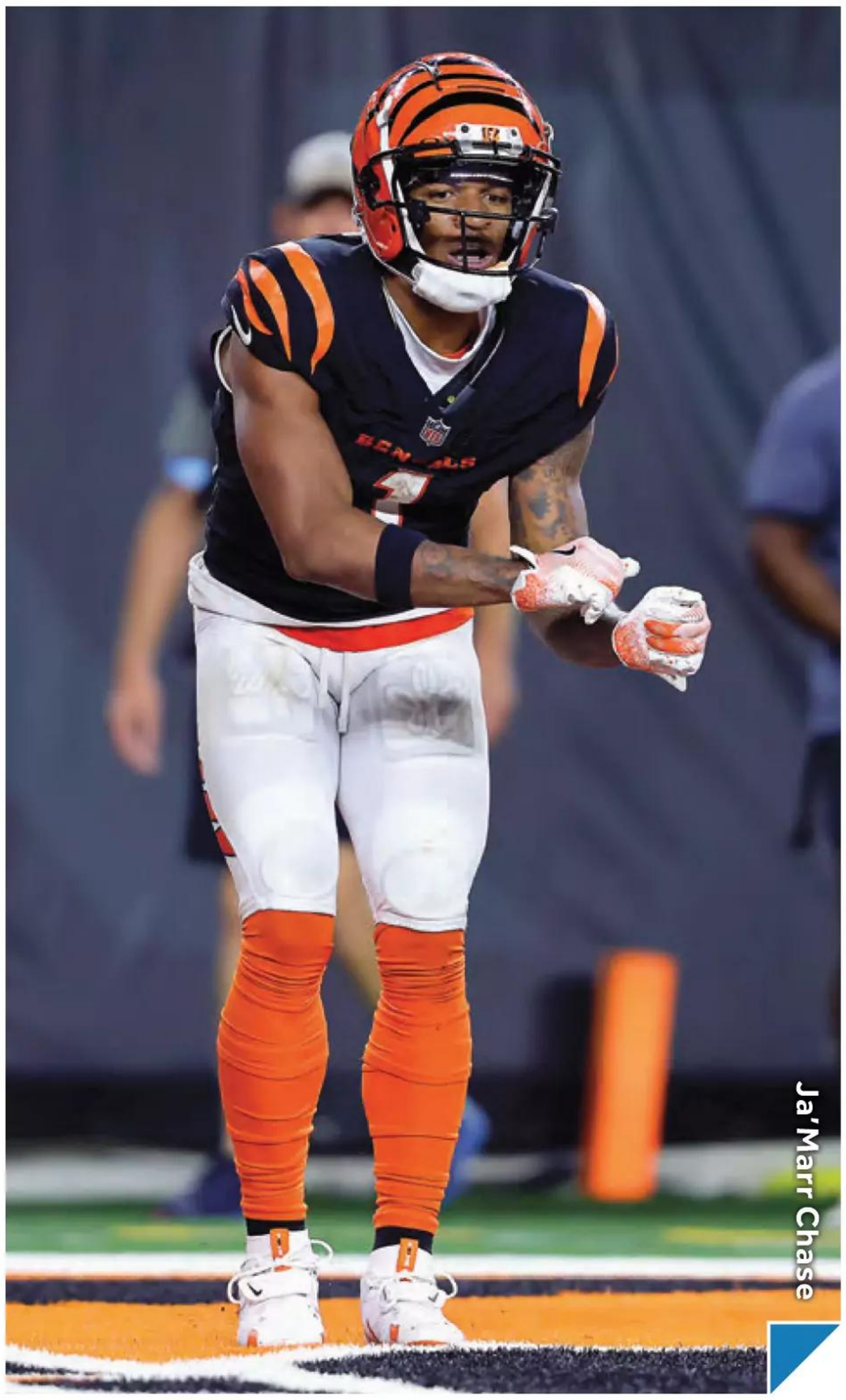
Going on a cold streak and trying to make up ground by betting more is how bettors get into financial trouble. Similarly, do not overextend if you go on a tear, because few things are worse than winning 70% of your bets during a hot streak and losing it all because of poor bankroll management practices. When you win, giving it back is a sin.

DIVERSIFY YOUR SPORTSBOOK PLATFORMS

Shopping for the best lines is one of the best ways to improve your chances of staying in the black. While it's easier to place all of your wagers on one platform, you're costing yourself opportunities – and money – by taking that approach. Consistently finding the best odds by shopping around will greatly increase your wins and return.

Professional sports bettors tend to have win rates of at least 53%, and anything approaching 60% long term is extraordinarily high. Winning one or two more bets out of 100 doesn't sound like much, but it can be the difference between being profitable or taking a loss. Similarly, if you like a futures bet at +800 but it's available at +1200 at another book, those moves change how often you need to win to make money.

Practice bankroll management and line shopping this football season, and you'll see the difference.



Ja'Marr Chase

Jahmyr Gibbs

FROM LEFT: JOSEPH MAIORANA-IMAGN IMAGES; DAVID REGINEK-IMAGN IMAGES

BY SEAN TREPPEDI

NFL PROP HEROES

Like anything, placing a prop bet during the NFL season comes with a science, which is pinpointing an edge. Otherwise, we may as well be children in a candy store with too many options, too many possibilities, too many games in a season.

Since the rise of legalized online sports betting, the overwhelming optics of selecting a player prop leaves many to make decisions based on nothing other than bias. Before haphazardly making an investment on your couch 10 minutes before kickoff, it's more beneficial to look at trends that can help reveal those edges.

The most popular player prop is the anytime touchdown scorer, which is defined by a player who physically brings the ball into the end zone — by carry or catch — at any point in a game. Jahmyr Gibbs finished 2024 with the highest volume of total touchdowns at 20, but he tied Derrick Henry, who scored 18, in cashes on his touchdown prop in 13 games throughout the regular season.

Gibbs went on to score in his lone playoff game, while Henry scored in the two he played. James Cook, who tied Henry with 18 scores in the regular season, found paydirt in two of the Bills' three playoffs games.

If you want to piggyback these statlines into 2025, I'd look for value on those three players in the two-plus touchdown market as their respective offenses shouldn't be too unfamiliar. Including playoffs, both Gibbs and Cook recorded six multi-score games. Impressively, the triple-crown receiving winner, Ja'Marr Chase, had five games with more than one score all by way of reception.

In the Over/Under departments, we all love to play the Over. Chase was last season's go-to prop target in receiving yardage and receptions. He averaged 100.5 yards a game (clearing the rest of the field by more than 10 yards) and reeled in 7.47 catches. But this is exactly why the public hammers the Bengals receiver and books jack up the line.

Chase was marked with an average line of 92.5 yards and 7.5 receptions in 2024. He failed to hit 50% in both props.

Instead, let's forget astronomical lines and look to George Kittle, who as a 31-year-old tight end, cleared both his yardage and receptions prop in 11 of 15 games last season, translating to a 73.3% hit rate. His average lines were 46.5 yards and 4.5 receptions. Given his age and position, I don't expect those to rise in 2025, but I do expect Brock Purdy to continue feeding him on drag routes to keep the offense on the field.

The same logic applies to Saquon Barkley, who despite coming within 100 yards of the all-time record, hit only 47% of his rushing yardage props.

The unpredictability of Josh Allen's role as a rusher is why Cook hit his yardage prop in eight of 17 regular-season games. His line traveled as far as 18 points throughout the season. A competent rusher alongside an elite dual-threat quarterback is just the target to find profitability from in the backfield.

2025 NFL STAFF PREDICTIONS

	Odds Favorite	Michael Arinze	Andy Fenelon	Boyce Garrison	Matt Jacob	Doug Kezirian	Michael Leboff
AFC East	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills
AFC North	Ravens	Ravens	Bengals	Ravens	Bengals	Bengals	Ravens
AFC South	Texans	Texans	Texans	Colts	Jaguars	Texans	Jaguars
AFC West	Chiefs	Chiefs	Chargers	Chiefs	Chiefs	Chiefs	Broncos
AFC Wild Card	Bengals	Dolphins	Chiefs	Bengals	Ravens	Ravens	Chiefs
AFC Wild Card	Chargers	Bengals	Broncos	Chargers	Chargers	Steelers	Bengals
AFC Wild Card	Broncos	Chargers	Patriots	Dolphins	Texans	Chargers	Steelers
NFC East	Eagles	Commanders	Eagles	Commanders	Eagles	Eagles	Commanders
NFC North	Lions	Lions	Packers	Lions	Lions	Bears	Lions
NFC South	Buccaneers	Buccaneers	Buccaneers	Falcons	Panthers	Falcons	Panthers
NFC West	Rams	Rams	49ers	Rams	Rams	Rams	Rams
NFC Wild Card	49ers	Eagles	Lions	Packers	Commanders	Commanders	Eagles
NFC Wild Card	Commanders	Packers	Rams	Eagles	49ers	Packers	Vikings
NFC Wild Card	Packers	Cardinals	Bears	49ers	Buccaneers	Buccaneers	Bears
AFC Champion	Bills	Chiefs	Chargers	Ravens	Bengals	Bills	Ravens
NFC Champion	Eagles	Lions	49ers	Commanders	Rams	Eagles	Lions
Super Bowl LX Winner	Eagles	Lions	Chargers	Ravens	Bengals	Eagles	Ravens

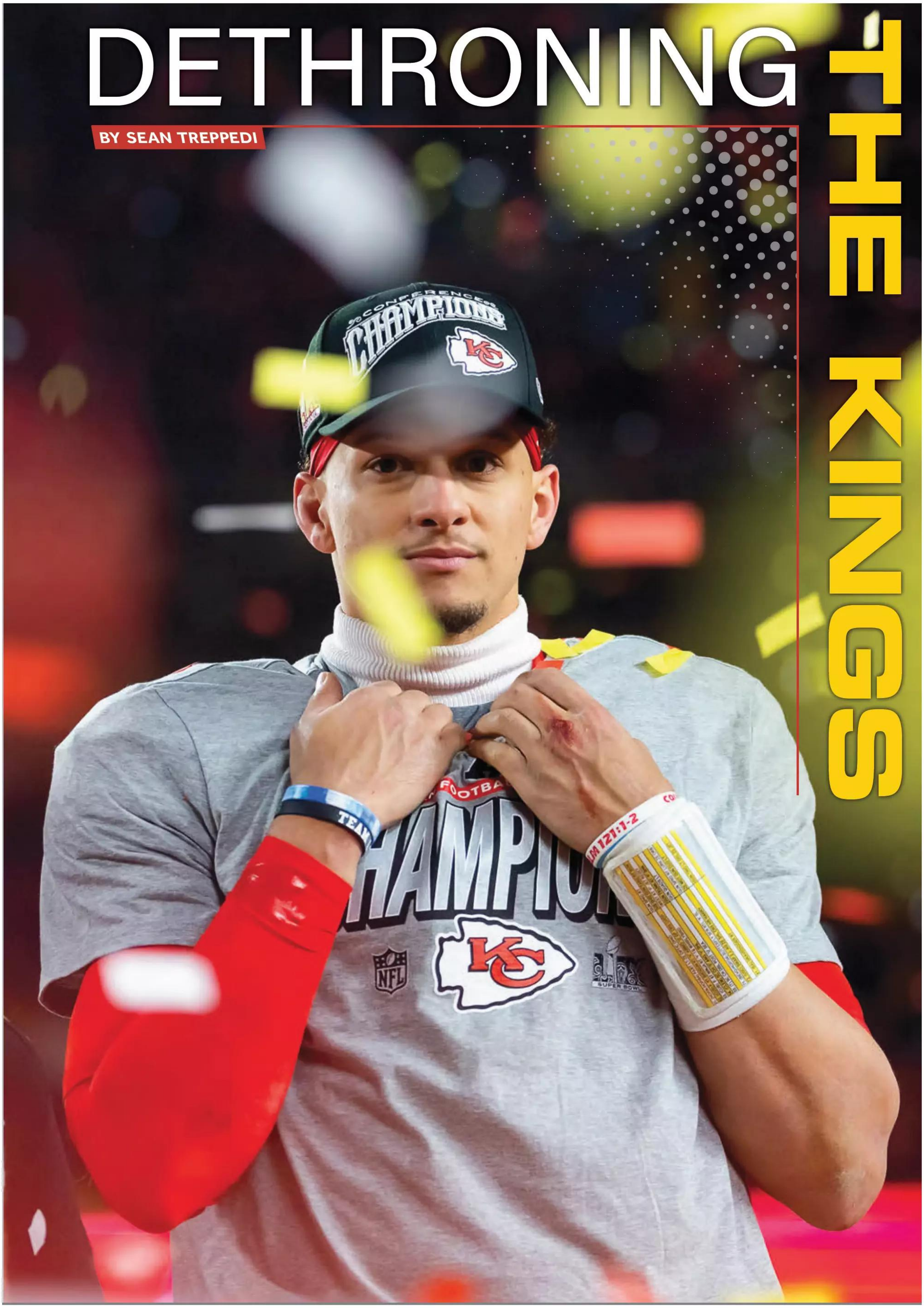
2025 NFL POWER RATINGS

	Ryan Reynolds	Sean Treppedi
	Bills	Bills
	Ravens	Bengals
	Jaguars	Texans
	Chiefs	Chiefs
	Bengals	Ravens
	Chargers	Dolphins
	Jets	Chargers
	Eagles	Commanders
	Bears	Lions
	Panthers	Buccaneers
	49ers	Rams
	Rams	Eagles
	Vikings	49ers
	Lions	Packers
	Bills	Bills
	Rams	Commanders
	Rams	Bills

	Team	Win Total	SB Odds	Power
1	Eagles	11.5	+750	87.5
2	Ravens	11.5	+700	87.0
3	Bills	11.5	+700	86.0
4	Chiefs	11.5	+750	85.0
5	Lions	10.5	10/1	84.0
6	49ers	10.5	21/1	83.5
7	Rams	9.5	19/1	83.5
8	Bengals	9.5	21/1	83.5
9	Packers	9.5	22/1	83.0
10	Commanders	9.5	21/1	83.0
11	Chargers	9.5	26/1	83.0
12	Vikings	8.5	21/1	82.5
13	Buccaneers	9.5	27/1	82.0
14	Broncos	9.5	27/1	82.0
15	Texans	9.5	25/1	81.5
16	Bears	8.5	43/1	81.0
17	Cowboys	7.5	38/1	81.0
18	Steelers	8.5	45/1	80.5
19	Dolphins	8.5	75/1	80.5
20	Seahawks	7.5	60/1	80.0
21	Cardinals	8.5	44/1	79.5
22	Colts	7.5	85/1	78.5
23	Patriots	7.5	60/1	78.0
24	Falcons	7.5	55/1	78.0
25	Jaguars	7.5	85/1	77.5
26	Raiders	7.5	120/1	77.0
27	Panthers	6.5	110/1	76.5
28	Giants	5.5	240/1	76.0
29	Jets	5.5	170/1	76.0
30	Titans	5.5	230/1	75.5
31	Browns	5.5	300/1	75.0
32	Saints	5.5	400/1	73.0

DETHRONING THE KINGS

BY SEAN TREPPEDI



MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

With three juggernauts at the top of the heap, it should come as zero surprise that the 2025 AFC Championship futures market lacks a strong consensus opinion among oddsmakers.

To wit: In late spring, DraftKings and FanDuel had Baltimore and Buffalo as co-favorites, with Kansas City third; BetMGM had the Ravens and Chiefs as co-favorites (with the Bills third); and Caesars Sportsbook had Buffalo on top, Baltimore second and Kansas City third.

Among the trio, the Chiefs obviously have put AFC futures bettors in the green recently, winning the conference five of the last six seasons. At this point, oddsmakers know better than to count out Patrick Mahomes.

Perhaps, though, it really is time to pick a usurper. But before doing so, it's important to ponder this: Is Chiefs fatigue a real thing in the betting market, or have the winners of half of the last six Super Bowls genuinely regressed?

Kansas City refaced some key areas of its defense in the offseason. And with Travis Kelce's role diminishing, the Chiefs now look to a young receiving core to recharge the Mahomes-led offense.

In assessing the challengers, reigning NFL MVP Josh Allen's 0-4 playoff record against K.C. (and 0-2 mark in the AFC Championship) is a tired tale. What's most astonishing — perhaps to the Chiefs' credit — is that in those four games, Allen has posted a 100.2 passer rating with nine touchdowns, one interception and averaged 66.8 rushing yards.

Lamar Jackson's two MVPs and dazzling play have gotten him no closer than a 2023 AFC Championship loss to Mahomes. Jackson's postseason play has been far less sexy than Allen's: He's 3-5 in the playoffs, averaging just 217 passing yards and 1.4 picks per game.

But while many deliberate over this three-way rat race, I'm opting for a dark-horse selection that boasts tremendous value while remaining a reasonable investment: Joe Burrow and the Bengals, who offer a handsome return at odds as high as +1000 (BetMGM and bet365).

Aside from Tom Brady, Burrow is the only AFC quarterback to defeat Mahomes in the playoffs. The depth of Burrow's resilience can't be better exemplified than in 2024, when he started off 1-4, then willed his way to eight victories in the remaining 12 games and narrowly missing the playoffs — despite leading the NFL in passing yards (4,918) and touchdowns (43).

Burrow has only been to the postseason twice in his five NFL seasons. But when he gets there, he's proven to be a force, reaching the AFC Championship Game twice (and the Super Bowl once).

Burrow last reached the playoffs three years ago, when he fell to Mahomes by a late field goal in the 2022 AFC title game. Burrow's season-ending wrist injury kept Cincy out the following year, and if we're speaking honestly, the Bengals would have been stronger contenders than several AFC entrants had they squeaked in last year.

Ultimately, this recommendation comes down to which quarterback is most equipped to stun Mahomes and Kansas City's stellar defense in one January game. Empirically, that's Burrow.

If you concur, consider jumping on the Bengals now. Because after opening the season against the Browns and Jaguars, their AFC Championship odds are likely to plummet.

TINA MACINTYRE-YEE/DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

2025 AFC CHAMPIONSHIP ODDS

TEAM	ODDS
Buffalo Bills	+350
Baltimore Ravens	+380
Kansas City Chiefs	+400
Cincinnati Bengals	+900
Houston Texans	+1200
Los Angeles Chargers	+1300
Denver Broncos	+1300
Pittsburgh Steelers	+2100
New England Patriots	+2900
Miami Dolphins	+3500
Jacksonville Jaguars	+3500
Indianapolis Colts	+3800
Las Vegas Raiders	+5000
Tennessee Titans	+9000
New York Jets	+10000
Cleveland Browns	+13000

AFC EAST

BUFFALO BILLS

BY SEAN TREPPEDI

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 15-5
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 12-8

Josh Allen

Something's eventually gotta give with the Buffalo Bills, right? After all, they have had the AFC East under their thumb for five consecutive seasons, during which time quarterback Josh Allen has blossomed into a generational talent.

However, a chip remains perched on the shoulder of the reigning MVP. Allen has yet to get beyond the AFC Championship Game, where the Bills have fallen to the Chiefs twice in the last five years.

Winning when it matters most hasn't materialized in Buffalo. So we find ourselves asking this question yet again: Is this the season Allen and Co. pull the sword from the stone?

2025 WIN TOTAL: 11.5 (OV -160/UN +135)

The Bills have hit double-digit victories in six straight seasons, all with Allen under center. In 2024, they tied the franchise record of 13 wins for the third time in five seasons.

A team that was a field goal away from a Super Bowl appearance a year ago will give it another go in 2025, bringing back a roster that scored the second-most points in the NFL.

With the league's fifth-easiest schedule, Buffalo will be favored in every game this season. So barring an injury to Allen, this talented group should finish no worse than 12-5.

ODDS TO WIN AFC EAST (-230)

The Dolphins, Jets and Patriots have been paying rent to the Bills throughout this decade, and there is no reason to project a disruption to that arrangement in 2025. Oddsmakers agree; while Buffalo boasts a win total of 11.5, no other AFC team is projected for more than 8.5 victories (Miami). That three-win gap appears a bit larger when considering the Dolphins are 1-9 against Buffalo since the start of Allen's reign in 2020. This feels like easy money, even at a less-than-desirable price.

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL (+350)

It's a three-way rat race atop the AFC, with the Ravens (+360) and the Chiefs (+430) once again contending with Buffalo for conference supremacy. The Bills had to go through both Baltimore and Kansas City in last year's postseason, but went 1-for-2. Don't be shocked if they have to travel a similar path in January. Also, don't be surprised if Buffalo's Super Bowl price tag gets adjusted after Week 1, when they host the Ravens.

POWER RATING

86.0

NO. 3 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

41.13

NO. 28 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	Baltimore	8:20
Sept. 14	at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Sept. 18	Miami	8:15
Sept. 28	New Orleans	1:00
Oct. 5	New England	8:20
Oct. 13	at Atlanta	7:15
Oct. 19	BYE	
Oct. 26	at Carolina	1:00
Nov. 2	Kansas City	4:25
Nov. 9	at Miami	1:00
Nov. 16	Tampa Bay	1:00
Nov. 20	at Houston	8:15
Nov. 30	at Pittsburgh	4:25
Dec. 7	Cincinnati	4:25
Dec. 14	at New England	1:00
Dec. 21	at Cleveland	1:00
Dec. 28	Philadelphia	4:25
Jan. 4	N.Y. Jets	TBD

FAVORITE FUTURES BET:

JOSH ALLEN: WIN MVP (+600)

Without Allen, who has posted at least 40 total touchdowns in each of his six NFL seasons, the Bills would not be an annual Super Bowl contender. And while he finally won his first MVP in 2024, he still came up short of the ultimate goal. A dogged pursuit of that goal — paired with the blood mission of mowing down his pesky AFC foes — sets the runway for Allen to capture back-to-back MVPs.

MARK KONEZNY-IMAGN IMAGES

AFC EAST

MIAMI

DOLPHINS

BY SEAN TREPPEDI

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 8-9
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 7-10

Tyreek Hill

The Dolphins were on the verge of a breakthrough in 2024, but another head injury to Tua Tagovailoa caused the franchise quarterback to miss a chunk of the season's first half.

That played a major role in Miami finishing 8-9 and missing the playoffs for the first time in three years, with All-Pro receiver Tyreek Hill publicly stating his frustration with the franchise at season's end.

2025 WIN TOTAL: 8.5 (OV +155/UN -180)

Despite playing in all 17 games last season, Hill saw significant regression in almost every receiving category. That needs to change for Miami to compete, which makes Hill a prime bounce-back candidate for 2025.

The main problems for the Dolphins last season: a negative turnover differential, and an inability to consistently convert on third and fourth downs. Defensively, Miami allowed the fourth-fewest yards but failed to protect leads late in a few critical games. Not surprisingly, fixing that was a point of emphasis in the offseason.

There's a good chance the Dolphins' pendulum will swing in a positive direction in 2025, thanks to the league's seventh-easiest schedule. If injuries and distractions are kept in check, Miami is a solid bet to clear eight wins — something it did in the first four seasons of Tagovailoa's career, despite his struggles to stay on the field.

POWER RATING
80.5
T-18 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
41.38
NO. 26 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	at Indianapolis	1:00
Sept. 14	New England	1:00
Sept. 18	at Buffalo	8:15
Sept. 29	N.Y. Jets	7:15
Oct. 5	at Carolina	1:00
Oct. 12	L.A. Chargers	1:00
Oct. 19	at Cleveland	1:00
Oct. 26	at Atlanta	1:00
Oct. 30	Baltimore	8:15
Nov. 9	Buffalo	1:00
Nov. 16	Washington (Madrid)	9:30 a.m.
Nov. 23	BYE	
Nov. 30	New Orleans	1:00
Dec. 7	at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Dec. 15	at Pittsburgh	8:15
Dec. 21	Cincinnati	8:20
Dec. 28	Tampa Bay	1:00
Jan. 4	at New England	TBD

ODDS TO WIN AFC EAST (+700)

The Dolphins have finished as the AFC East's runner-up three consecutive years. I don't expect the Bills to relinquish their position atop the division, but with the Jets and Patriots in the midst of overhauls, Miami's grip as the bonafide No. 2 team is strengthened. If Hill does deliver a trademark season, the Dolphins will contend — but not enough to outduel Buffalo for the crown.

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL (+3400)

This team still has wild-card potential, and punching a ticket to the dance obviously opens a path to the Super Bowl — if Hill delivers, Tagovailoa stays healthy and the defense makes some minor adjustments. That's a lot of "ifs," though. So take the +205 price on the Dolphins to make the playoffs as a more reasonable future with value.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET: TUA TAGOVAILOA TO WIN COMEBACK PLAYER (+1800)

Since the Comeback Player of the Year criteria is now focused on players who rebound from injury, Tagovailoa has excellent value to win this award if he can lead the Dolphins to the playoffs. He posted a career-high 72.9% completion rate in 2024 and a third consecutive 100-plus passer rating. Not only is Tagovailoa capable of continuing that trend, but he's got lots to prove.

KIRBY LEE-IMAGN IMAGES

AFC EAST

NEW YORK JETS

BY SEAN TREPPEDI

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 5-12

AGAINST THE SPREAD: 6-11

Garrett Wilaon

With the disaster of 2024 in the rearview mirror, the New York Jets move on to greener pastures with Aaron Glenn at the helm and Justin Fields under center.

Glenn's mind for versatility and physicality transformed the Lions from one of the NFL's worst defenses into an aggressive unit that allowed the seventh-fewest points last season (despite being on the right side of several blowouts).

Can Glenn have the same impact with the Jets, whose current 14-year playoff drought is the longest of any major North American pro sports franchise? Or are big-time hires in New York the equivalent of putting lipstick on a pig?

2025 WIN TOTAL: 5.5 (OV -160/UN +135)

Reaching six victories might sound like a tall order for a franchise that has cleared that threshold just three times in the last nine years. But minus over-the-hill quarterback Aaron Rodgers, this is basically the same group that many considered a legitimate contender the past two seasons.

Prior to last year's 5-12 debacle, the Jets reached seven victories in consecutive seasons — both with Zach Wilson serving as the leading passer. Now Fields owns the keys to the offense. And while the former first-round pick has underperformed in his first four pro seasons, this is probably his best opportunity (and certainly his best set of weapons).

On the opposite side of the ball, New York's once highly ranked defense struggled to create turnovers and was exploited at the line of scrimmage. Expect those issues to get rectified, with Glenn and new defensive coordinator Steve Wilks breathing life into All-Pro talents Sauce Gardner and Quinnen Williams.

Add it up, and six-plus wins isn't unreasonable.

POWER RATING

76.0

T-28 OF 32)

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

42.63

NO. 17 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	Pittsburgh	1:00
Sept. 14	Buffalo	1:00
Sept. 21	at Tampa Bay	1:00
Sept. 29	at Miami	7:15
Oct. 5	Dallas	1:00
Oct. 12	Denver (London)	9:30 a.m.
Oct. 19	Carolina	1:00
Oct. 26	at Cincinnati	1:00
Nov. 2	BYE	
Nov. 9	Cleveland	1:00
Nov. 13	at New England	8:15
Nov. 23	at Baltimore	1:00
Nov. 30	Atlanta	1:00
Dec. 7	Miami	1:00
Dec. 14	at Jacksonville	1:00
Dec. 21	at New Orleans	1:00
Dec. 28	New England	1:00
Jan. 4	at Buffalo	TBD

ODDS TO WIN AFC EAST (+1400)

Exciting personnel adjustments and a new quarterback who should benefit from coaching continuity and trust make the 2025 Jets a team with a lot to prove and nothing to lose. But this has been the Bills' division for half a decade. And the Dolphins have consistently finished ahead of New York in that time. The last time Gang Green placed higher than third in the AFC East? 2015. Hard pass.

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL (+9500)

The Jets emerging as the AFC's champion over perennial contenders like Kansas City, Baltimore, Buffalo and even Cincinnati is the definition of a pipe dream (and that's reflected in New York's AFC Championship price). Donating to charity should be your alternative.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET: GARRETT WILSON: OVER 4.5 RECEIVING TDS (+100)

With Davante Adams gone, Wilson reclaims his role as the Jets' undisputed top target. Even in a disgruntled 2024 season, he still managed a career-high seven touchdowns. This line simply represents the doubts in Fields' passing abilities. However, he and Wilson connected for 1,155 yards and 11 touchdowns in three seasons at Ohio State. Throw in Wilson's elite route running, contested-catch ability and red-zone presence, and this prop has a solid floor.

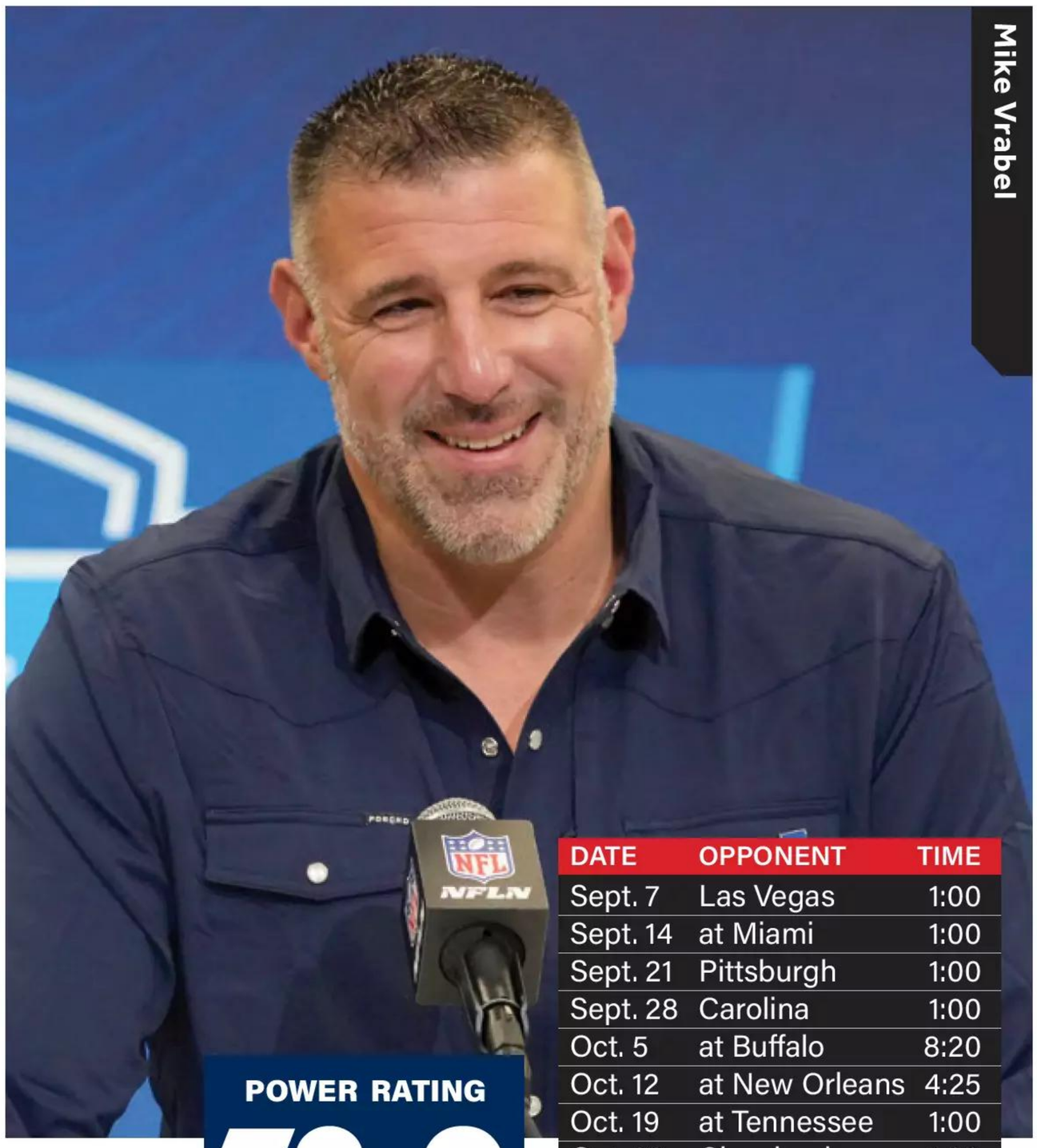
GREGORY FISHER-IMAGN IMAGES

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

BY SEAN TREPPEDI

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 4-13
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 7-9-1



Life without Bill Belichick proved disastrous for the 2024 New England Patriots. They finished 4-13 and missed the playoffs for a third consecutive year, costing Jerod Mayo his job after just one season.

With the exception of quarterback Drake Maye, New England's 2024 draft class brought nothing to the table, as long-term player development continues to be a major concern. However, as Mike Vrabel settles in as the Patriots' third head coach in three years, expectations have taken a sharp uptick for 2025.

2025 WIN TOTAL: +7.5 (OV -160/UN +135)

New England hasn't cleared seven regular-season wins since posting an 8-9 record in 2022. However, Vrabel's hire — complemented by the return of offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels, along with new defensive coordinator Terrell Williams' violent approach — can only move the team back toward relevance.

Maye showed flashes in 2024, completing 67% of his passes to a receiving corps that had no true No. 1 target. Now the sophomore QB has that target in Stefon Diggs, who joins the team after missing much of last season with a torn ACL. But after 10 seasons in the league, how much juice is left in the 31-year-old's tank?

Even with the Patriots possessing the NFL's second-easiest schedule, it's a reach to expect Maye to make a significant second-year jump behind an offensive line with several question marks.

Yes, Vrabel is a huge upgrade on the sidelines. But he'll only be able to pull so many rabbits out of his hat. Stick with the Under.

POWER RATING
78.0
T-23 OF 32)

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
39.77
NO. 31 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	Las Vegas	1:00
Sept. 14	at Miami	1:00
Sept. 21	Pittsburgh	1:00
Sept. 28	Carolina	1:00
Oct. 5	at Buffalo	8:20
Oct. 12	at New Orleans	4:25
Oct. 19	at Tennessee	1:00
Oct. 26	Cleveland	1:00
Nov. 2	Atlanta	1:00
Nov. 9	at Tampa Bay	1:00
Nov. 13	N.Y. Jets	8:15
Nov. 23	at Cincinnati	1:00
Dec. 1	N.Y. Giants	8:15
Dec. 7	BYE	
Dec. 14	Buffalo	1:00
Dec. 21	at Baltimore	1:00
Dec. 28	at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Jan. 4	Miami	TBD

ODDS TO WIN AFC EAST (+500)

New England, which scored victories over Buffalo and the Jets last season, should be even more competitive in the division in 2025. It's unrealistic, though, to expect this team to hopscotch its way from fourth place to a division crown — at least while Josh Allen remains at large.

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL (+2900)

The AFC is simply swarming with too many perennial contenders to rationalize making this play. Vrabel should instill stability, but with Maye in only his second season, a Super Bowl is out of the realm of reason. Instead, invest in the Patriots making the playoffs as a sneaky wild-card candidate (at solid +156 odds).

FAVORITE FUTURES BET: MIKE VRABEL TO WIN COACH OF THE YEAR (+750)

Vrabel entered summer with the second-shortest Coach of the Year odds because the narrative is teed up perfectly for him: prodigal son returns home after winning three Super Bowls in 14 years as a player. With a favorable schedule, a knack for developing young talent and a proven track record of players responding positively to his coaching style, Vrabel should be in the hunt for this award all season long, and if the Pats return to the playoffs, he'll run away with it.

KIRBY LEE-IMAGN IMAGES

AFC NORTH

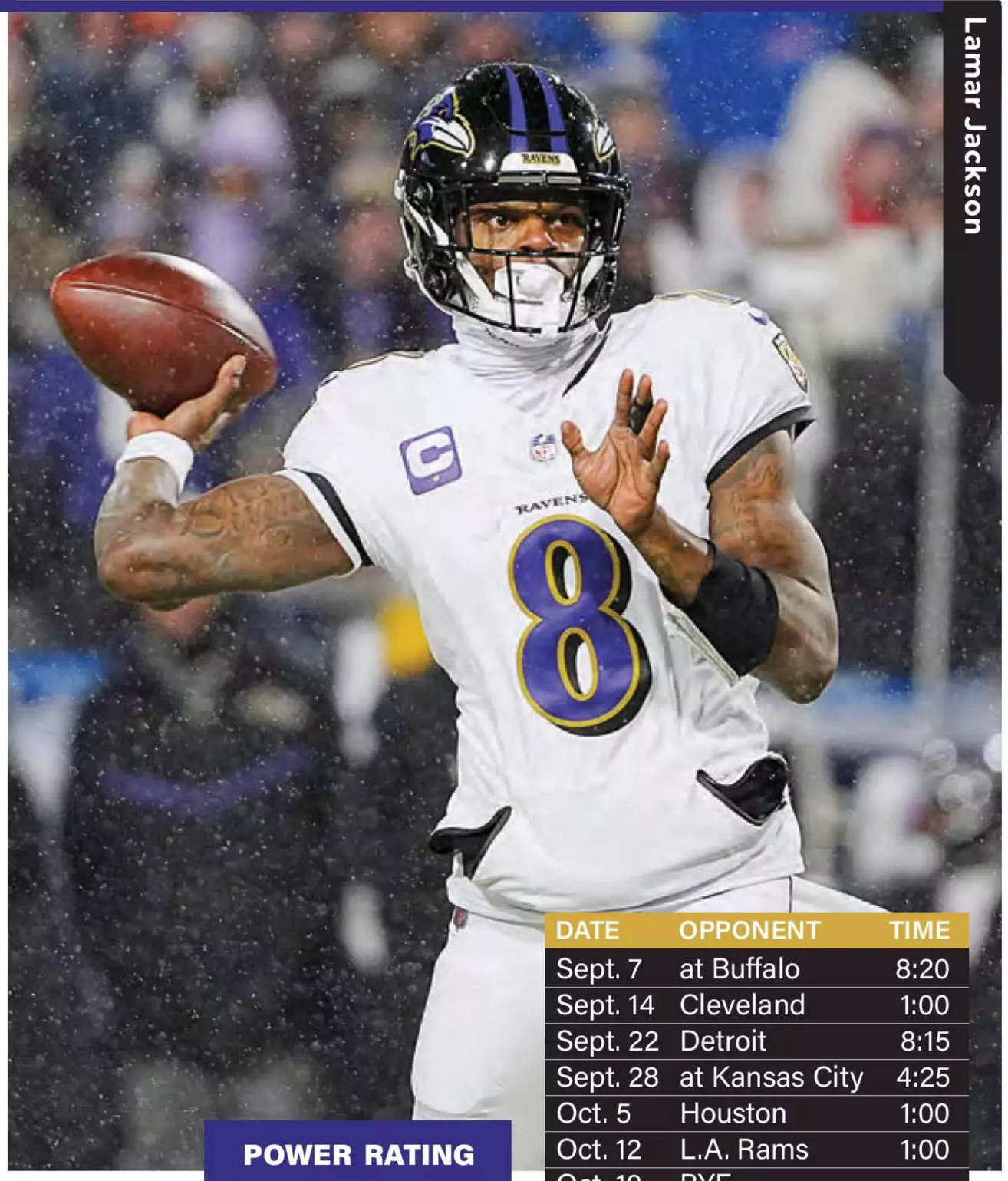
BALTIMORE

RAVENS

BY MICHAEL ARINZE

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 13-6
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 11-7-1



Lamar Jackson

The Baltimore Ravens have been one of the NFL's most successful teams in recent years. However, it won't be easy to maintain that success in 2025 with a brutal schedule that features nine opponents that made the postseason a year ago. And that doesn't even include two games against division rival Cincinnati.

The early portion of the slate looks particularly daunting. So don't be surprised if Baltimore starts slow and struggles to meet expectations.

2025 WIN TOTAL: 11.5 (OV -110/UN -110)

After winning 12 games in 2024, the Ravens will face the ninth-toughest schedule — and it is nasty from the jump.

First up is a trip to Buffalo for a Sunday night rematch of last year's thrilling Divisional Round playoff game. Baltimore then returns home to face the Browns and Lions before a visit to Kansas City in Week 4. Two home games follow … but against the Texans and Rams.

Add it up, and five of the Ravens' first six opponents made the 2024 postseason (and four won at least one playoff game).

The back end of the schedule isn't exactly a picnic, either, with two games each against Cincinnati and Pittsburgh, along with a Week 17 journey to Green Bay — all from Thanksgiving onward.

So with regard to Baltimore's lofty win total, there's no choice but Under. However, the demanding regular-season schedule could make the Ravens dangerous come the postseason.

POWER RATING

87.0

NO. 2 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

43.61

NO. 9 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	at Buffalo	8:20
Sept. 14	Cleveland	1:00
Sept. 22	Detroit	8:15
Sept. 28	at Kansas City	4:25
Oct. 5	Houston	1:00
Oct. 12	L.A. Rams	1:00
Oct. 19	BYE	
Oct. 26	Chicago	1:00
Oct. 30	at Miami	8:15
Nov. 9	at Minnesota	1:00
Nov. 16	at Cleveland	4:25
Nov. 23	N.Y. Jets	1:00
Nov. 27	Cincinnati	8:20
Dec. 7	Pittsburgh	1:00
Dec. 14	at Cincinnati	1:00
Dec. 21	New England	1:00
TBD	at Green Bay	TBD
Jan. 4	at Pittsburgh	TBD

ODDS TO WIN AFC NORTH (-140)

Even as an odds-on favorite, Baltimore offers good value in this futures market. The division figures to be a two-way race between the Ravens and Bengals, but Baltimore has owned the rivalry of late (10-4 since 2018, including a current four-game win streak).

More importantly, the Ravens are the division's most complete team and boast enough talent on both sides of the ball to win a third straight AFC North crown.

ODDS TO WIN SUPER BOWL (+700)

Once again, the Ravens are loaded. And once again, their title aspirations largely will hinge on quarterback Lamar Jackson's ability to exorcise his January demons. The two-time MVP is just 3-5 in the playoffs.

Given all the quality quarterbacks in the conference, the path to the Super Bowl is more difficult in the AFC. More than that, as the co-Super Bowl favorite, there's no value in Baltimore's +700 title price — at least not now.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET: LAMAR JACKSON OVER 750.5 RUSHING YARDS (-114)

Derrick Henry erupted for 1,921 rushing yards in 2024, but we should see some regression from the running back who will turn 32 in January. The likeliest candidate to pick up the slack: Lamar Jackson. The dual-threat QB has cleared this line six straight years, including two seasons when he played fewer than 13 games.

TINA MACINTYRE-YEE/DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

CINCINNATI

BENGALS

AFC NORTH

BY MICHAEL ARINZE

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 9-8
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 10-7

Joe Burrow

This could be a year of redemption for Cincinnati after a disappointing 9-8 finish in 2024 barely left the team on the wrong side of the playoff cutline.

The Bengals didn't help themselves with an 0-3 start. And while quarterback Joe Burrow and the offense eventually got rolling, those contributions were undone by a defense that squandered six games in which Cincy scored at least 25 points (including four when the offense topped 30 points).

So the front office brought in a new defensive coordinator with a proven track record. If it pans out, the Bengals have the potential tol rebound in a big way.

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	at Cleveland	1:00
Sept. 14	Jacksonville	1:00
Sept. 21	at Minnesota	1:00
Sept. 29	at Denver	8:15
Oct. 5	Detroit	4:25
Oct. 12	at Green Bay	4:25
Oct. 16	Pittsburgh	8:15
Oct. 26	N.Y. Jets	1:00
Nov. 2	Chicago	1:00
Nov. 9	BYE	
Nov. 16	at Pittsburgh	1:00
Nov. 23	New England	1:00
Nov. 27	at Baltimore	8:20
Dec. 7	at Buffalo	4:25
Dec. 14	Baltimore	1:00
Dec. 21	at Miami	8:20
TBD	Arizona	TBD
Jan. 4	Cleveland	TBD

POWER RATING

83.5

T-6 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

43.24

NO. 12 TOUGHEST OF 32

2025 WIN TOTAL: 9.5 (OV -120/UN +100)

You could easily make the case that the Bengals have the NFL's best quarterback-wide receiver pairing.

Last season, Burrow led the league in completions (460), touchdowns (43) and passing yards (4,918), while having the third-best total QBR (74.7). And Ja'Marr Chase won the wide receiver triple crown, leading the league in yards (1,708), receptions (127) and touchdowns (17).

Unfortunately, the defense was as putrid as the offense was sublime. Perhaps the most egregious defensive stat: Opponents scored touchdowns on nearly 68% of their red zone trips, the third-highest rate in the NFL.

Underscoring the negative impact the defense had on the overall results: Seven of Cincinnati's eight losses were by six or fewer points.

To fix things, the Bengals brought in longtime defensive guru Al Golden, who spent the past three seasons in college running Notre Dame's stop unit. Last year, that group allowed the second-fewest points in the nation (14.3 per game).

In recent years, teams like the Chiefs have achieved success with a bend-but-don't-break defensive style. If the Bengals can successfully adopt a similar approach, their offense is more than talented enough to lead this squad to double-digit wins.

ODDS TO WIN AFC NORTH (+220)

Cincinnati's divisional price of +230 translates to an implied probability of 30%. My projections say that number should be closer to 25%. As a result, I'd need odds closer to +300 to consider a play on the Bengals.

ODDS TO WIN SUPER BOWL: +2100

I'd be more willing to take a punt on Cincinnati to win the Super Bowl with odds closer to +2500. Unfortunately, the defense is still a question mark, especially when compared with the other legitimate contenders for the Vince Lombardi Trophy.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET: JOE BURROW: OVER 4200.5 PASSING YARDS (-114)

The fate of this wager relies entirely on Burrow's ability to stay healthy. In three seasons in which he played at least 16 games, Burrow covered this number by at least 275 yards (including a career-best 4,918 yards last year).

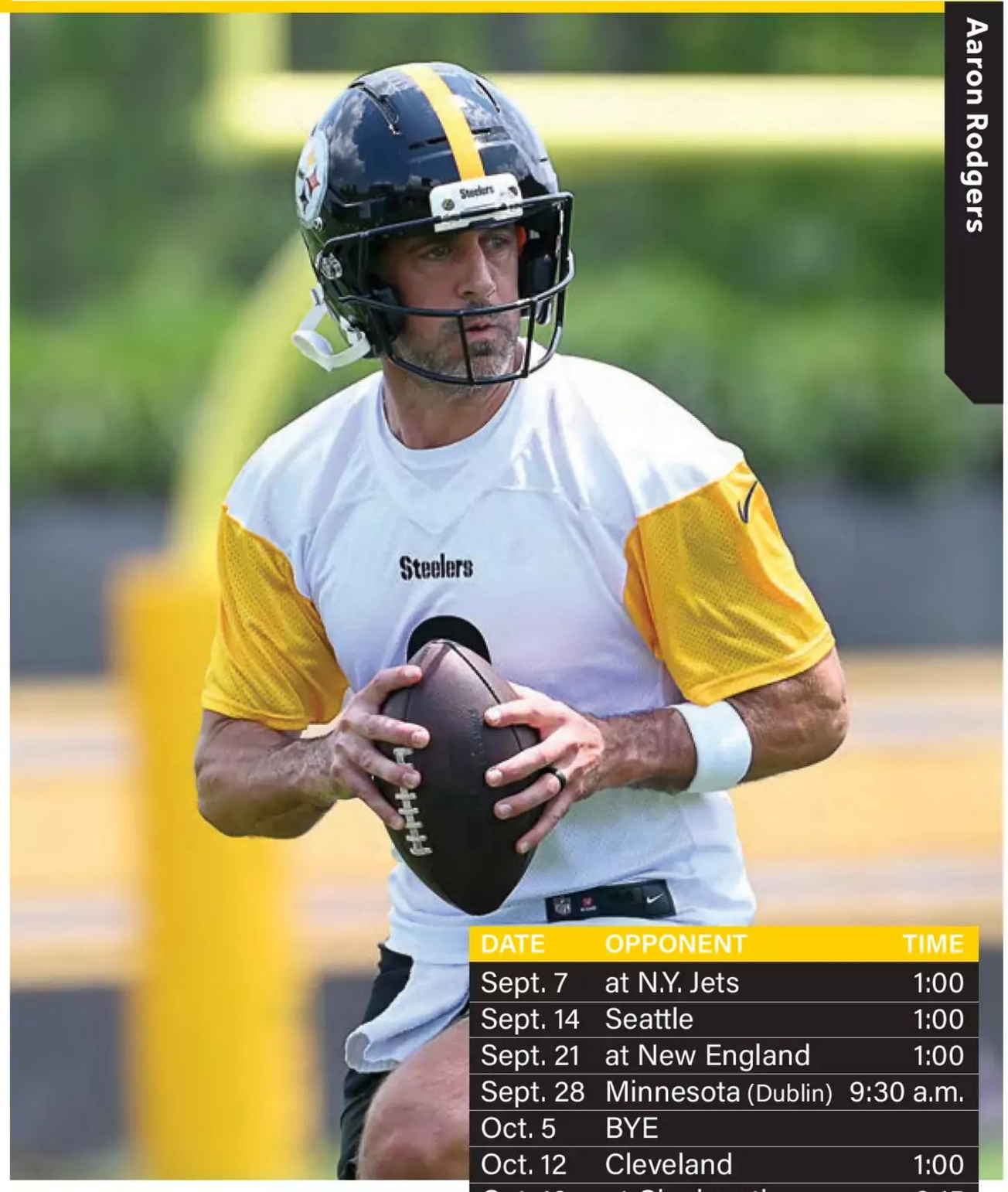
BARRY REEGER-IMAGN IMAGES

AFC N ORTH

PITTSBURGH STEELERS

BY MICHAEL ARINZE

2024 BETTING RECORD
STRAIGHT UP: 10-8
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 11-7


Aaron Rodgers

Despite not having a franchise quarterback since Ben Roethlisberger retired in 2022, the Steelers continue to find ways to win. Even with a rotation of Russell Wilson and Justin Fields under center in 2024, head coach Mike Tomlin extended his streak of consecutive seasons without a losing record to 18.

This season, Aaron Rodgers is the presumptive starter in Pittsburgh after the four-time MVP inked a cap-friendly deal with the team. With Rodgers in the fold, Tomlin should be able to continue his remarkable run of success.

2025 WIN TOTAL: 8.5 (OV +110/UN -130)

Pittsburgh's win-total projection assumed all along that Rodgers would be the Week 1 starter as the over/under odds barely moved following the quarterback's signing in mid-June.

While it's easy to criticize the quarterback for an underwhelming 5-12 season with the Jets last year, others within the organization deserve a greater share of the blame. After all, Rodgers came back from a torn Achilles and finished in the top 10 in touchdowns (28) and passing yards (3,897).

Meanwhile, his defense dropped from third in Expected Points Added per Play (-0.11) in 2023 to 21st (+0.05).

Even at age 41, Rodgers undoubtedly can improve a Steelers offense that somehow ranked behind the Jets in 2024.

As usual, Pittsburgh will field a top-notch defense, led by linebacker T.J. Watt and three key free agent additions: cornerback Darius Slay Jr., safety Juan Thornhill and linebacker Malik Harrison. Also, five of the team's seven draft picks were defensive players, including Oregon DT Derrick Harmon in the first round.

There's enough overall talent to push the Steelers past their win-total projection for a sixth straight season (and 10th time in the last 13 years).

ODDS TO WIN AFC NORTH: +550

Rodgers will have to make up for lost time in learning the playbook and building a rapport with his new teammates. That won't happen overnight. Also, I project a minimum of 11 wins will be required to take this division, with the Ravens being the most likely to reach that mark. Pass.

POWER RATING
80.5
T-18 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
44.48
NO. 7 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Sept. 14	Seattle	1:00
Sept. 21	at New England	1:00
Sept. 28	Minnesota (Dublin)	9:30 a.m.
Oct. 5	BYE	
Oct. 12	Cleveland	1:00
Oct. 16	at Cincinnati	8:15
Oct. 26	Green Bay	8:20
Nov. 2	Indianapolis	1:00
Nov. 9	at L.A. Chargers	8:20
Nov. 16	Cincinnati	1:00
Nov. 23	at Chicago	1:00
Nov. 30	Buffalo	4:25
Dec. 7	at Baltimore	1:00
Dec. 15	Miami	8:15
Dec. 21	at Detroit	4:25
Dec. 28	at Cleveland	1:00
Jan. 4	Baltimore	TBD

ODDS TO WIN SUPER BOWL: +4500

While adding Rodgers to the roster should be enough for the Steelers to extend their run without a losing season, ending a 17-year title drought is way too much of an ask.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET:

DK METCALF: OVER 975.5 RECEIVING YARDS (-114)

George Pickens' departure to the Cowboys makes DK Metcalf the undisputed WR1 in Pittsburgh. Metcalf cleared 960 receiving yards in each of his last five seasons in Seattle, and he'll see plenty of targets from Rodgers in Arthur Smith's offense .

PHILIP G. PAVELY-IMAGN IMAGES

CLEVELAND

BROWNS

BY MICHAEL ARINZE

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 3-14
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 4-13

Myles Garrett

The Cleveland Browns have stockpiled quarterbacks, including selecting two in the 2025 NFL Draft. Yet in true Browns fashion … they don't exactly have a clear No. 1. Which is one reason why it's difficult to have a ton of faith in Cleveland going into the 2025 season.

Indeed, the Browns could find themselves in yet another race to the bottom. As such, bettors should proceed with caution when evaluating their futures.

2025 WIN TOTAL: 5.5 (OV +125/UN -150)

Cleveland received positive reviews for its offseason moves. Still, there is plenty of uncertainty surrounding the all-important quarterback position.

Deshaun Watson has underperformed since signing a fully guaranteed five-year, $230 million deal prior to the 2022 season, and he's currently on the mend from an Achilles injury that required a second surgery in January. With Watson on the shelf, the Browns re-signed 40-year-old Joe Flacco and acquired 2022 first-round bust Kenny Pickett, then drafted both Dillion Gabriel (first round) and Shedeur Sanders (fifth round).

Among those five QBs, it is anyone's guess who will be running the offense come Week 1. Whoever it is, he'll face a demanding early schedule that includes four opponents that aren't just playoff contenders, but Super Bowl contenders: Cincinnati (home), Baltimore (away), Green Bay (home) and Detroit (away).

Given the murky quarterback situation, the Browns definitely don't have the look of a "win-now" team. Granted, six wins isn't a high bar to clear in a 17-game season. But it wouldn't surprise me if Cleveland fell short of its win total for the 14th time in 18 years and secured another early first-round draft pick.

POWER RATING
75.0
NO. 31 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
45.31
NO. 3 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	Cincinnati	1:00
Sept. 14	at Baltimore	1:00
Sept. 21	Green Bay	1:00
Sept. 28	at Detroit	1:00
Oct. 5	Minnesota (London)	9:30 a.m.
Oct. 12	at Pittsburgh	1:00
Oct. 19	Miami	1:00
Oct. 26	at New England	1:00
Nov. 2	BYE	
Nov. 9	at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Nov. 16	Baltimore	4:25
Nov. 23	at Las Vegas	4:05
Nov. 30	San Francisco	1:00
Dec. 7	Tennessee	1:00
Dec. 14	at Chicago	1:00
Dec. 21	Buffalo	1:00
Dec. 28	Pittsburgh	1:00
TBD	at Cincinnati	

ODDS TO WIN AFC NORTH: (+3200)

The Browns' longshot divisional odds reflect how far behind the pack they are in the AFC North. As long as the quarterback situation remains unclear, it's not even worth making a small low-risk, high-reward wager on a franchise that hasn't won a division title since 1989.

ODDS TO WIN SUPER BOWL: (300/1)

Cleveland has the league's second-longest Super Bowl odds behind New Orleans. If it manages to do the unthinkable, it would supplant the 1999 St. Louis Rams (150/1) as the biggest preseason underdog to win the coveted Lombardi Trophy. However, you might be better off spending your hard-earned money on a lottery ticket than backing the Browns to win the Super Bowl.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET: MYLES GARRETT OVER 14.25 SACKS

In May, Caesars listed this prop at 12.5, which is no longer available. Regardless, this is still a doable number for Garrett, who should get more opportunites with rookie Mason Graham generating pressure from the opposite side.

JEFF LANGE/BEACON JOURNAL

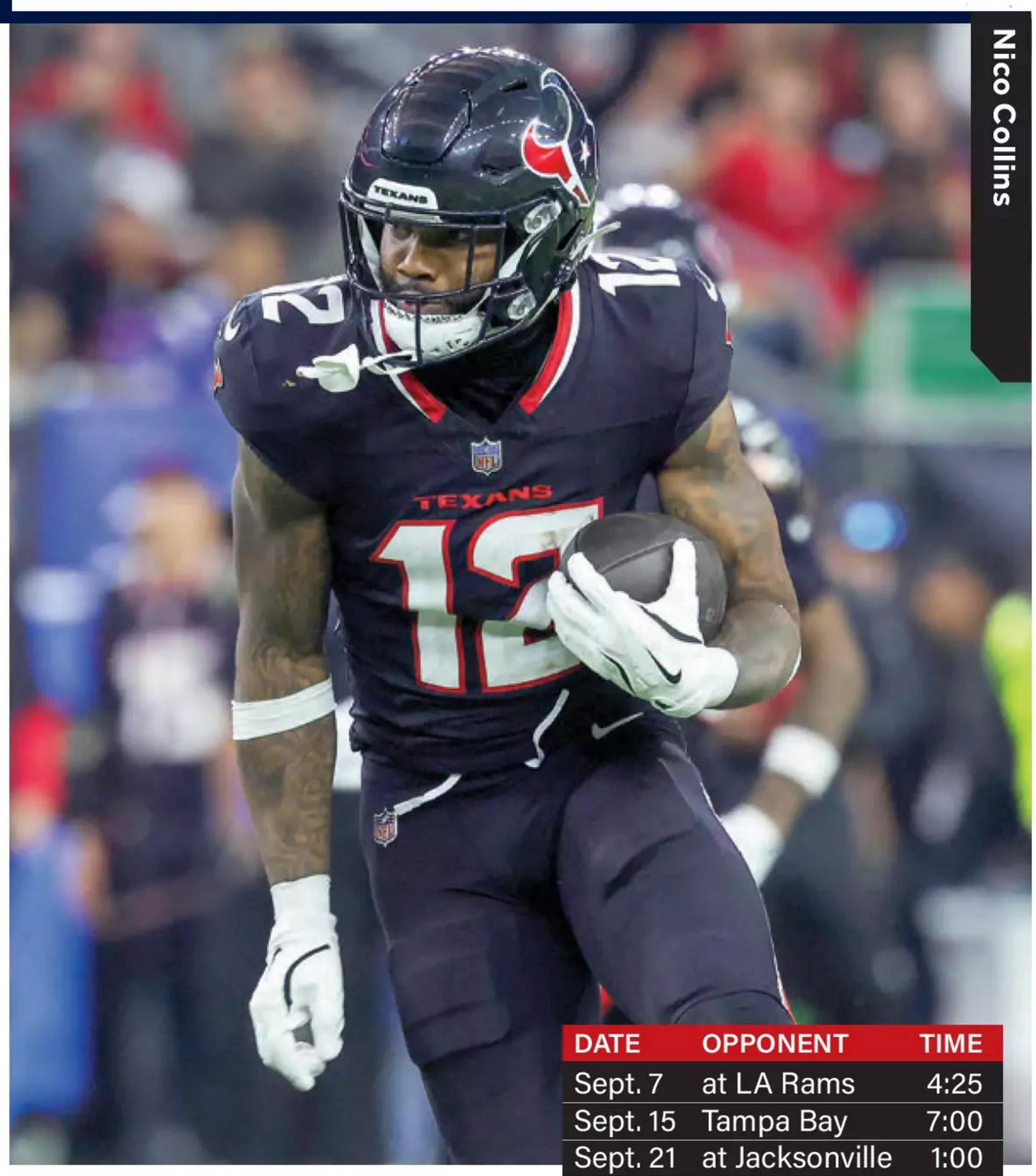
AFC SOUTH

HOUSTON TEXANS

BY SEAN TREPPEDI

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 11-8
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 9-8-2



Nico Collins

The DeMeco Ryans era has brought two playoff wins to Houston in as many years. That coincides with the arrival of a franchise quarterback in C.J. Stroud, whose immediate maturity as a pocket passer has propelled the Texans to double-digit wins in back-to-back seasons.

Dull competition across the AFC South has made life easier for the Texans — and inflated their futures odds. They're projected to win a third straight division title for the first time in the franchise's 23-year history. But do they offer worthwhile prices?

2025 WIN TOTAL: 9.5 (OVER +105/UNDER -125)

Stroud was put in a difficult spot throughout 2024 — especially down the stretch — thanks to long-term injuries sustained by three key members of his receiving corps. Now with Nico Collins and Tank Dell both healthy, and veteran Christian Kirk acquired to replace Stefon Diggs, Stroud will have a capable set of weapons on hand.

Houston also made some adjustments to its offensive line by way of trade and the draft. All in all, though, I don't see enough net-net improvement in this roster that makes 10 wins a surefire lock. Some regression could be coming with several big tests in the first half of the season — including season-opening games against the Rams (road) and Buccaneers (home), followed by a Week 5 trip to Baltimore.

ODDS TO WIN AFC SOUTH: (+105)

The Texans went 5-1 record within the AFC South during their trot to the division title in 2024. As their three rivals continue to advance respective rebuilds, that record will be difficult to replicate. As it is, Houston's division loss last year was to the lowly Titans. Are the Texans the safest pick to win another division crown? Yes. Is the +115 price right? No.

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL (+1200)

In the landscape of the monotonous AFC South, Houston is overvalued. However, even with recency bias considered, there actually is great value on the Texans to win the AFC. Within the context of the conference's other top candidates, oddsmakers are overlooking a team that has come within a victory of two straight AFC Championship Games — a team that also beat the Bills during the 2024 regular season. It's worth the punt.

POWER RATING
81.5
NO. 15 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
43.59
NO. 11 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	at LA Rams	4:25
Sept. 15	Tampa Bay	7:00
Sept. 21	at Jacksonville	1:00
Sept. 28	Tennessee	1:00
Oct. 5	at Baltimore	1:00
Oct. 12	BYE	
Oct. 20	at Seattle	10:00
Oct. 26	San Francisco	1:00
Nov. 2	Denver	1:00
Nov. 9	Jacksonville	1:00
Nov. 16	at Tennessee	1:00
Nov. 20	Buffalo	8:15
Nov. 30	at Indianapolis	1:00
Dec. 7	at Kansas City	8:20
Dec. 14	Arizona	1:00
Dec. 21	Las Vegas	4:25
TBD	at LA Chargers	TBD
Jan. 4	Indianapolis	TBD

FAVORITE FUTURES BET: NICO COLLINS: MOST RECEIVING YARDS (+750)

Collins catapulted to elite status in 2023 after compiling 1,297 yards in 2023 (eighth-best among all wide receivers). Last year, he missed five games and still broke 1,000 yards while averaging 83.8 yards per game (fourth-best rate in the NFL). Give Collins a healthy season, and the sky's the limit.

TROY TAORMINA-IMAGN IMAGES

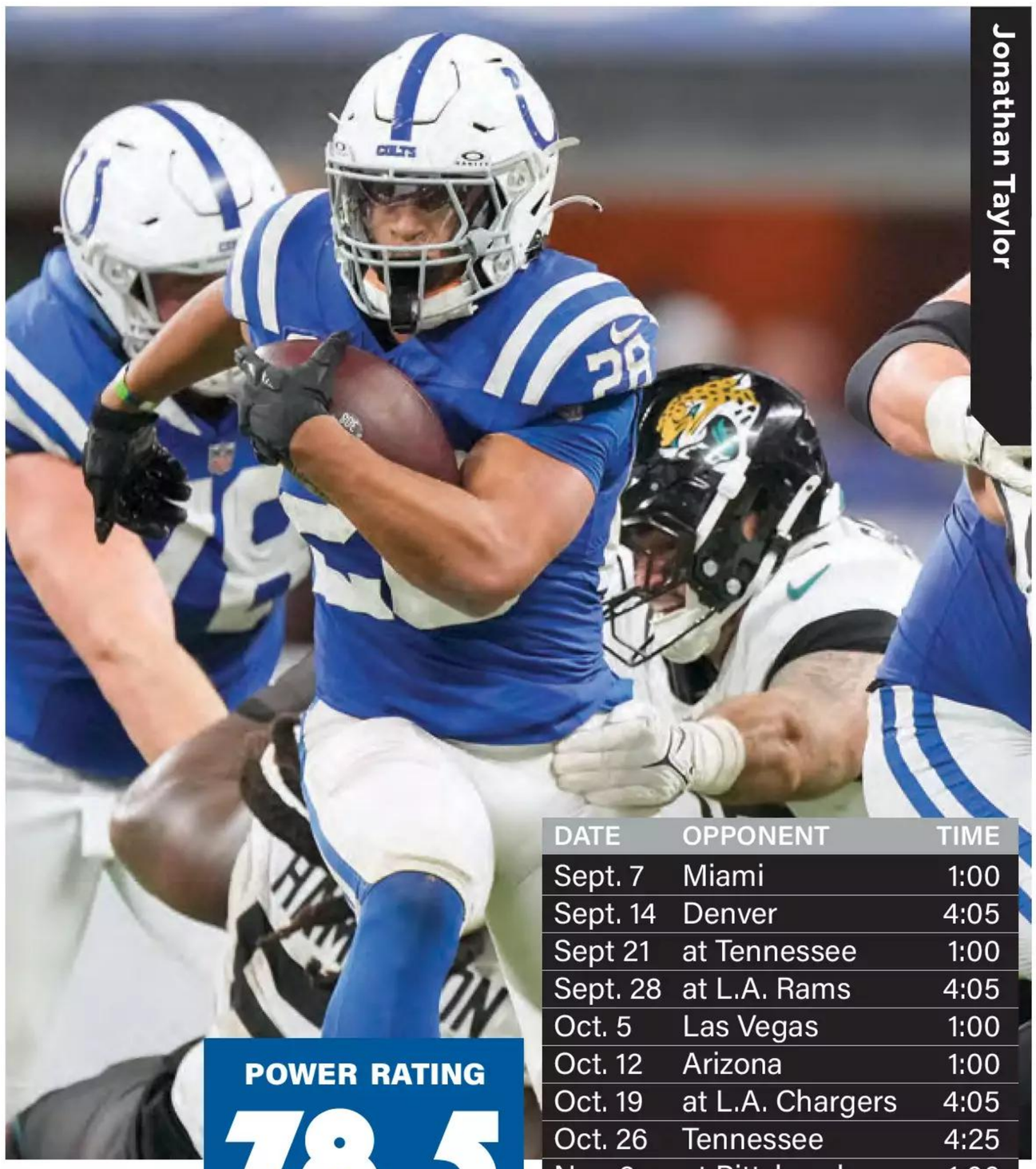
INDIANAPOLIS

COLTS

BY SEAN TREPPEDI

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 8-9
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 9-8



The Indianapolis Colts lingered a lot longer than their résumé warranted in 2024. The fact they remained in playoff contention until a Week 17 loss at the Giants speaks to how top-heavy the AFC is.

Despite a pedestrian 8-9 record, which included just one victory over a playoff team (Pittsburgh), coach Shane Steichen has managed to keep his team within arm's reach of a division title, finishing second in both of his seasons at the helm.

This year brings some new (and old) challenges, especially in the offensive backfield where quarterbacks Anthony Richardson and Daniel Jones likely will be in a tight competition throughout training camp (and perhaps beyond). It's not exactly the sexiest outlook at the league's most important position.

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	Miami	1:00
Sept. 14	Denver	4:05
Sept 21	at Tennessee	1:00
Sept. 28	at L.A. Rams	4:05
Oct. 5	Las Vegas	1:00
Oct. 12	Arizona	1:00
Oct. 19	at L.A. Chargers	4:05
Oct. 26	Tennessee	4:25
Nov. 2	at Pittsburgh	1:00
Nov. 9	Atlanta (Berlin)	9:30 a.m.
Nov. 16	BYE	
Nov. 23	at Kansas City	1:00
Nov. 30	Houston	1:00
Dec. 7	at Jacksonville	1:00
Dec. 14	at Seattle	4:25
Dec. 22	San Francisco	8:15
Dec. 28	Jacksonville	1:00
Jan. 4	at Houston	TBD

POWER RATING
78.5
NO. 22 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
42.41
NO. 20 TOUGHEST OF 32

2025 WIN TOTAL: 7.5 (OV -110/UN -110)

Without a ground attack, the Colts would be in trouble. While they ranked 25th and 27th last season in passing yards and touchdowns, respectively, they compensated by finishing eighth and seventh in those same rushing categories, as Jonathan Taylor enjoyed a renaissance season.

Playing in the AFC South, the Colts have the advantage of a breezier schedule, although they have to face Denver's defense in Week 2 and the Rams on the road in Week 4. I'm not confident in either Richardson or Jones overcoming those early challenges. Add the fact that Taylor is a massive injury risk, and I'll lean Under 7.5 wins here.

ODDS TO WIN AFC SOUTH (+310)

For what it's worth, Indianapolis hasn't finished in last place since 2011 — although it hasn't won the division since 2014 (back in Andrew Luck's heyday). The AFC South is enough of a tossup that one could make a case for any team, but I'm still taking the quarterback situations of the Texans, Jaguars and Titans over Richardson and Jones. Being a perennial average team also hurts the Colts' value in this market. Steer clear.

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL (+3700)

The 2000s are now long enough in the past to be deemed retro. So, too, is Peyton Manning's playing career, along with the prospect of the Colts returning to the big game. Their AFC Championship price speaks for itself — and on the other hand, the odds on Indy to miss the playoffs (-220) are too steep.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET:

JONATHAN TAYLOR: UNDER 1200.5 RUSHING YARDS (-114)

Too much of this team's success hinges on Taylor. Problem is, the veteran tailback hasn't played a full season since 2021. Even when he rushed for 1,431 yards in 2024, he only played 14 games. This line accounts for that injury history, but I'm still fading Pro Football Focus' 14th-ranked running back in 2025, as defenses will stack the box and pressure Richardson and/or Jones into making mistakes.

GRACE HOLLARS/USA TODAY NETWORK VIA IMAGN IMAGES

AFC SOUTH

JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS

BY SEAN TREPPEDI

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 4-13
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 9-7-1

Brian Thomas Jr.

Jacksonville is only two years removed from a winning record and three years from having won a playoff game. However, a tumultuous 4-13 campaign in 2024 that netted a minus-115 point differential led to a front-office house cleaning and the hiring of former Buccaneers offensive coordinator Liam Coen as the new head coach.

In addition to being extremely active in free agency, the Jaguars traded up three spots in the draft, using the No. 2 overall pick on two-way Colorado sensation Travis Hunter. The Heisman Trophy winner is expected to receive extensive playing time at both wide receiver and cornerback.

2025 WIN TOTAL: 7.5 (OV -110/UN -110)

The Jaguars started 0-4 last season, but much of their overall disappointment can be attributed to quarterback Trevor Lawrence missing seven games with a shoulder injury. Now entering his fifth NFL season, Lawrence should benefit from Coen's hybrid-style offense that activates traditional run concepts and modern passing schemes.

Jacksonville gets the luxury of the eighth-easiest schedule this season, so with Hunter and stud-talent Brian Thomas Jr. at his disposal, Lawrence has a path to lead the Jaguars to at least eight victories — if he can stay on the field.

There's a lot to be proven with this refaced franchise, but there's enough budding talent to bet on Over 7.5 wins.

ODDS TO WIN AFC SOUTH: +300

The tradition of AFC South mediocrity was quite apparent when it took the Jaguars just nine victories to seize the division crown in 2022. That mediocrity is exactly what is devaluing all prices in this futures market — the Jaguars would boast better longshot odds in almost every other division.

That being said, if you're high on Jacksonville winning this lousy division, hold off until after Week 6. Because the Jags face the Bengals, 49ers, Chiefs and Rams in the first six weeks. You're apt to get a far better price after they get through that gauntlet (that is, assuming they don't go 3-1).

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL: +3600

This ceiling only goes so high. So even if the Jaguars are able to manufacture a playoff bid, it's difficult to see them plowing through the rest of the AFC. The safer play is Jacksonville to make the playoffs at +176.

POWER RATING
77.5
NO. 25 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
41.6
NO. 25 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	Carolina	1:00
Sept. 14	at Cincinnati	1:00
Sept. 21	Houston	1:00
Sept. 28	at San Francisco	4:05
Oct. 6	Kansas City	8:15
Oct. 12	Seattle	1:00
Oct. 19	LA Rams (London)	9:30 a.m.
Oct. 26	BYE	
Nov. 2	at Las Vegas	4:05
Nov. 9	at Houston	1:00
Nov. 16	LA Chargers	1:00
Nov. 23	at Arizona	4:05
Nov. 30	at Tennessee	1:00
Dec. 7	Indianapolis	1:00
Dec. 14	NY Jets	1:00
Dec. 21	at Denver	4:05
Dec. 28	at Indianapolis	1:00
Jan. 4	Tennessee	TBD

FAVORITE FUTURES BETS:

BRIAN THOMAS JR. OVER 1150.5 RECEIVING YARDS (-114)

This one looks too good to pass up after Thomas produced a 1,282-yard rookie campaign when his offense ranked 24th overall in passing yards and his quarterback was Mac Jones for half the year. Now with more stability around him, the former LSU standout is in position to accomplish even more in his sophomore season.

JEREMY REPER-IMAGN IMAGES

TENNESSEE

TITANS

BY SEAN TREPPEDI

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 3-14
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 2-15

Cam Ward

It's been an industry of losing in Tennessee over the last three years, with the Titans' 3-14 finish in 2024 being their worst campaign in a decade. Although the Will Levis experiment was a colossal failure, the franchise can at least turn the page to Cam Ward, the No. 1 overall selection in this year's NFL Draft.

Tennessee has been backpedaling each season since last winning the AFC South in 2021. But after landing in the NFL's basement last fall, forward is the only direction to move in 2025 with a new quarterback and coach.

POWER RATING
75.5
NO. 30 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
41.63
NO. 24 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	at Denver	4:05
Sept. 14	L.A. Rams	1:00
Sept. 21	Indianapolis	1:00
Sept. 28	at Houston	1:00
Oct. 5	at Arizona	4:05
Oct. 12	at Las Vegas	4:05
Oct. 19	New England	1:00
Oct. 26	at Indianapolis	4:25
Nov. 2	L.A. Chargers	1:00
Nov. 9	BYE	
Nov. 16	Houston	1:00
Nov. 23	Seattle	1:00
Nov. 30	Jacksonville	1:00
Dec. 7	at Cleveland	1:00
Dec. 14	at San Francisco	4:25
Dec. 21	Kansas City	1:00
Dec. 28	New Orleans	1:00
Jan. 4	at Jacksonville	TBD

2025 WIN TOTAL:

5.5 (OV -130/UN +110)

Levis and Mason Rudolph played hot potato at quarterback in 2024, and the end result was 21 interceptions (leading to the league's second-worst per-game turnover margin).

Tennessee's offensive line also was a mess, with the team's quarterbacks enduring the fifth-most sacks in the NFL. New GM Mike Borgonzi prioritized bolstering the front, adding such veteran talent as left tackle Dan Moore Jr. (Steelers) and right guard Kevin Zeitler (Lions). Both should help Ward in his transition to the pros.

While the Titans allowed the third-most points overall in 2024, the stop unit trailed only the defending-champion Eagles in both total defense and passing defense.

As for this win total, Tennessee cleared it eight consecutive times before cratering to 3-14 last season. In fact, it averaged nine wins during that eight-year span.

The Titans boast one of the NFL's easiest 2025 schedules, and they compete in what is arguably the weakest division. So bet on this squad to record at least six victories.

ODDS TO WIN AFC SOUTH: +750

All things considered, this is excellent value. Obviously, new head coach Brian Callahan has much to prove, and Ward probably will face a learning curve in reading coverages. Still, there's a world where Tennessee rises from worst to first. And if Ward comes out hot and the Titans take advantage of a relatively soft early schedule, this price could vanish quickly.

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL: +100/1

History is not on Tennessee's side in this regard: No team has ever reached the Super Bowl the same year as having the No. 1 draft selection. So while the division might be malleable, the elite AFC competition beyond that makes a Super Bowl trip unreasonable for the Titans.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET:

CAM WARD TO WIN OFFENSIVE ROOKIE OF THE YEAR (+320)

Ward steps in as a sizable gunslinger whose pocket mobility should alleviate the pressure on the rebuilt offensive line. Aside from elite arm talent, Ward also possesses the ability to identify pressure and attack holes in coverage — traits that separates him from his fellow rookies. Also worth noting: A quarterback has won this award four of the past six seasons.

STEVE ROBERTS-IMAGN IMAGES

AFC WEST

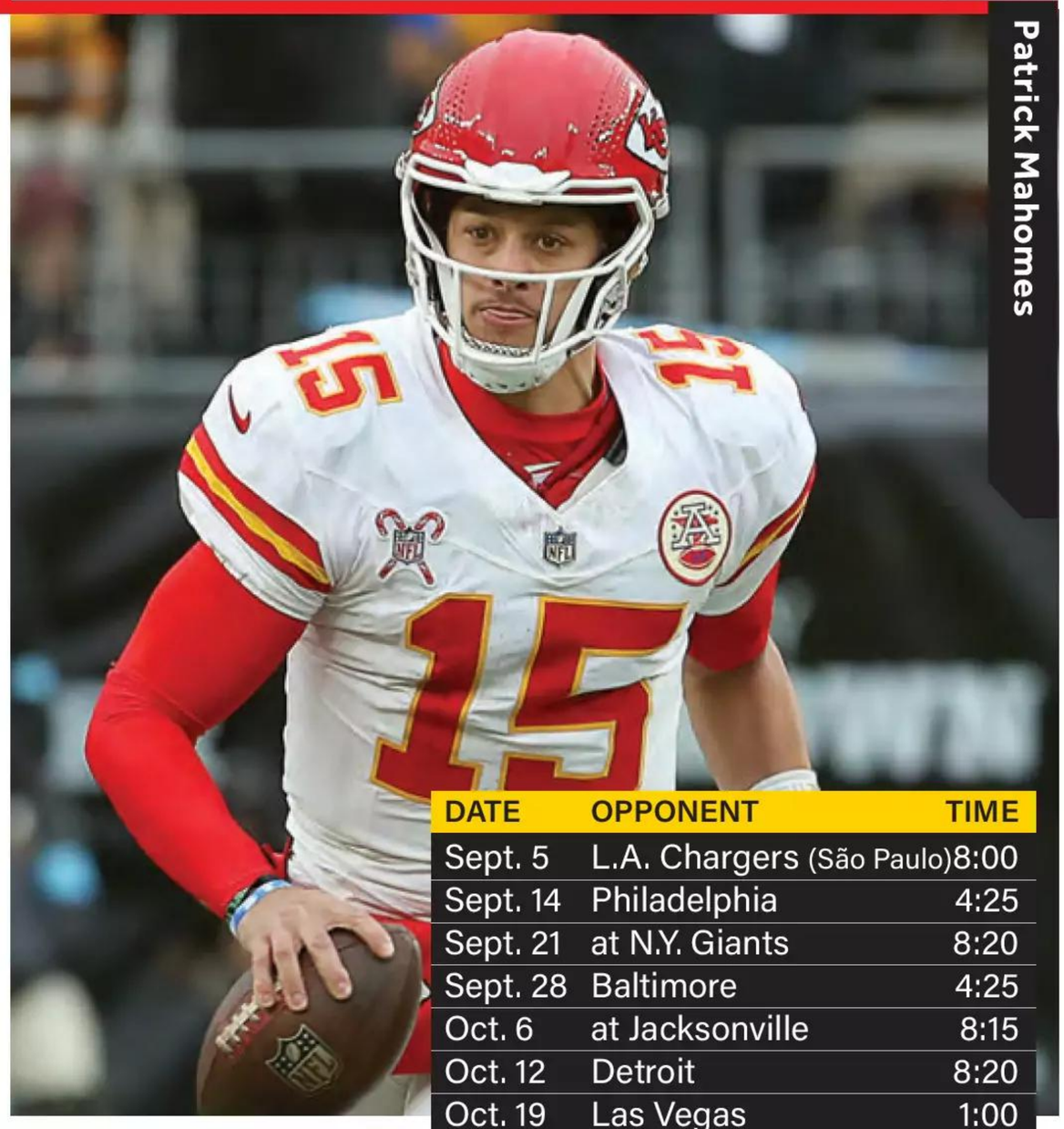
KANSAS CITY

CHIEFS

BY BOYCE GARRISON

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 17-3
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 9-11



Patrick Mahomes

The Kansas City Chiefs have won nine straight AFC West crowns and have been to seven straight conference title games. Never, though, were the Chiefs luckier than in 2024, when they went 12-0 in one-score games (including a three-point victory over Buffalo in the AFC Championship).

So Kansas City is due for some regression, right? Maybe … but don't bet on it.

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 5	L.A. Chargers (São Paulo)	8:00
Sept. 14	Philadelphia	4:25
Sept. 21	at N.Y. Giants	8:20
Sept. 28	Baltimore	4:25
Oct. 6	at Jacksonville	8:15
Oct. 12	Detroit	8:20
Oct. 19	Las Vegas	1:00
Oct. 27	Washington	8:15
Nov. 2	at Buffalo	4:25
Nov. 9	BYE	
Nov. 16	at Denver	4:25
Nov. 23	Indianapolis	1:00
Nov. 27	at Dallas	4:30
Dec. 7	Houston	8:20
Dec. 14	L.A. Chargers	1:00
Dec. 21	at Tennessee	1:00
Dec. 25	Denver	8:15
Jan. 4	at Las Vegas	TBD

POWER RATING
80.0
NO. 4 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
44.79
NO. 5 TOUGHEST OF 32

2025 WIN TOTAL: 11.5 (OV +105/UN -125)

One reason for the Chiefs' continued dominance (13-win average since the 17-game season was introduced in 2021): They routinely draft well, which they did again in 2025, filling gaps at left tackle and defensive tackle.

Are they getting older? Yes. All-pro tight end Travis Kelce, who will turn 36 in October, is no longer the mismatch he once was. Also, run stuffer/sack master Chris Jones will be 31 when the season kicks off.

But as long as Patrick Mahomes stays upright and Andy Reid patrols the sidelines, the Chiefs should continue to win a lot more than they lose.

Although many sharps believe Kansas City has reached its peak, betting against Mahomes, Reid and Jones seems unwise.

ODDS TO WIN AFC WEST: (-110)

K.C. is projected win total is two games higher than the Broncos and Chargers, and four better than the Raiders. That's a pretty big cushion for a team that many expect to take a step backward.

Based on their opponents' projected win totals, the Chiefs have the NFL's seventh-toughest schedule. But that's nothing new for a franchise whose nine consecutive division titles are two shy of the all-time record of 11 (held by the Patriots). In fact, K.C. has won the AFC West by at least three games five times in the last six seasons (including the last three in a row).

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL (+400)

Even given the Chiefs' recent run of success, it's difficult to get to the NFL's biggest game. And recently, they haven't had much margin for error.

After six straight years finishing in the top six in scoring, Kansas City has placed 15th the last two seasons. That's put tremendous pressure on the defense to carry the load come playoff time.

That said, if you're bullish on the Chiefs to win another AFC crown, consider holding out for a better price. After all, they open with two difficult games: Chargers (road) and defending champion Eagles (home).

FAVORITE FUTURES BETS:

PATRICK MAHOMES OVER 27.5 TD PASSES (-114)

Mahomes had at least 37 TD passes in four of his first five seasons as a starter, topping out at 50 in 2018 (his first year at the helm). His TD totals the past two seasons: 27 and 26. However, wide receiver injuries and the departure of Tyreek Hill contributed greatly to that production drop.

Assuming Rashee Rice (torn ACL in Week 4 last year) and Hollywood Brown (out injured until Week 16) stay healthy — and speedy wideout Xavier Worthy (59-catch rookie campaign) doesn't have a sophomore slump — Mahomes will have plenty of dangerous weapons to target. He also should have more time to find those targets behind an improved offensive line.

JAY BIGGERSTAFF-IMAGN IMAGES

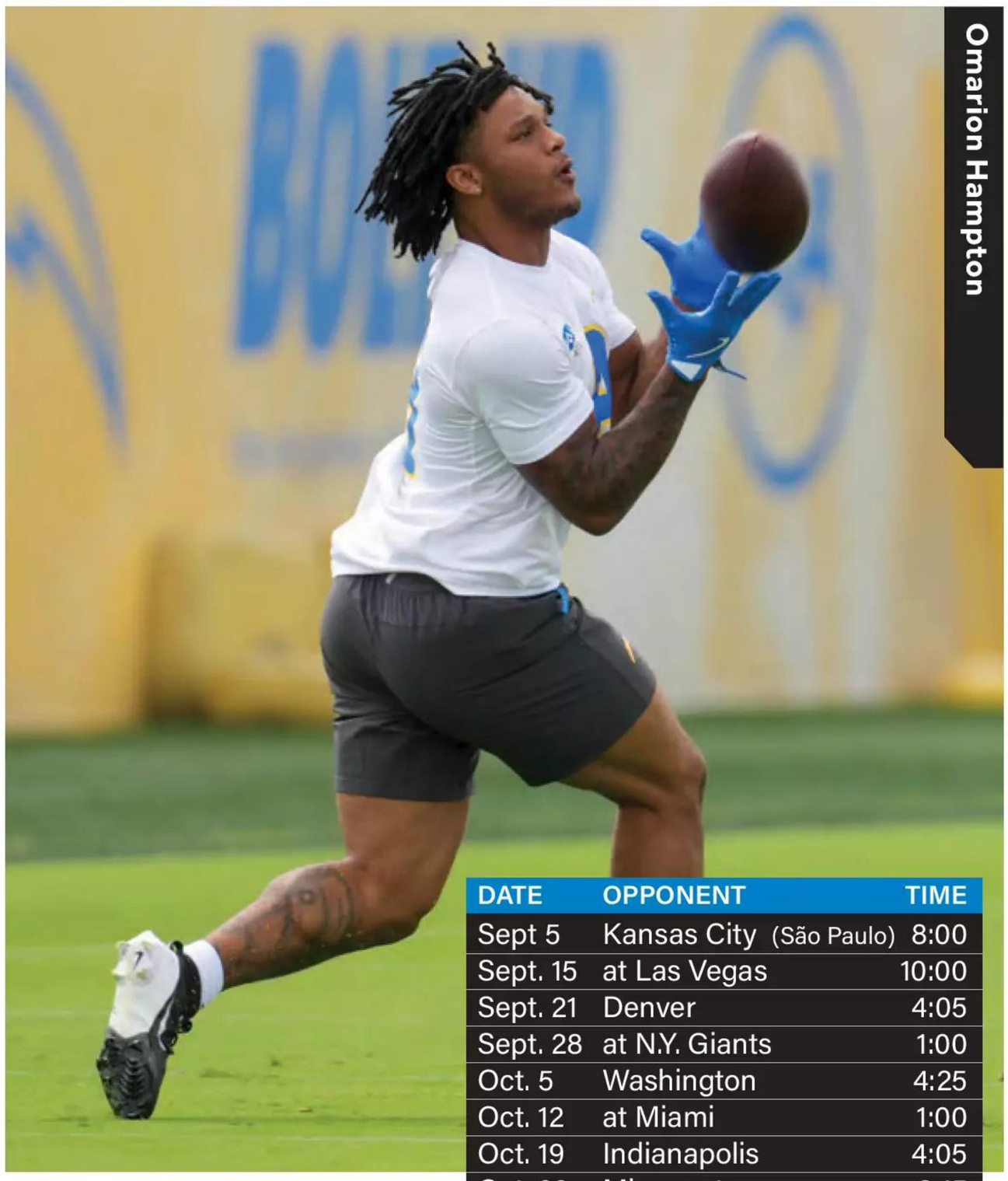
LOS ANGELES

CHARGERS

BY BOYCE GARRISON

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 11-7
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 12-6



Omarion Hampton

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept 5	Kansas City (São Paulo)	8:00
Sept. 15	at Las Vegas	10:00
Sept. 21	Denver	4:05
Sept. 28	at N.Y. Giants	1:00
Oct. 5	Washington	4:25
Oct. 12	at Miami	1:00
Oct. 19	Indianapolis	4:05
Oct. 23	Minnesota	8:15
Nov. 2	at Tennessee	1:00
Nov. 9	Pittsburgh	8:20
Nov. 16	at Jacksonville	1:00
Nov. 23	BYE	
Nov. 30	Las Vegas	4:25
Dec. 8	Philadelphia	8:15
Dec. 14	at Kansas City	1:00
Dec 21	at Dallas	1:00
TBD	Houston	TBD
Jan. 4	at Denver	TBD

The Los Angeles Chargers improved their win total from six games to 11 in new coach Jim Harbaugh's first season. Yet they still didn't come close to catching Kansas City for the division title, falling short by four games.

Harbaugh has never had a losing record in five years as an NFL head coach. The closest he came was in 2014 when the 49ers finished 8-8 in his final year in San Francisco. Overall, Harbaugh has averaged 11 wins — impressive, considering his first four seasons had 16-game schedules.

Meanwhile, the Chargers averaged fewer than eight wins per season in the four years preceding Harbaugh — and that includes a 10-7 finish in 2022. In other words, he's a big upgrade.

POWER RATING
83.0
T-9 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
42.58
NO. 18 TOUGHEST OF 32

2025 WIN TOTAL: 9.5 (OV -105/UN -115)

Everyone knows what "Chargering" means by now: turning a sure victory into a loss, often in ridiculous fashion. In that way, the Bolts usually keep fans on the edge of their seats.

So however you decide to bet their 2025 win total, it likely will be an entertaining ride all season.

Our advice? Take a pass, as this projection looks to be right on target. If you must make a wager, roll with the Over. Harbaugh's teams are always physical, and that still plays — especially late in the season.

ODDS TO WIN AFC WEST (+280)

It's difficult to back Los Angeles (or Denver or Las Vegas) to win the AFC West as long as Kansas City's Patrick Mahomes and Andy Reid reside in the division. Is it out of the question that the Chargers could end the Chiefs' nine-year division title run? No. But the value isn't there at this number.

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL: (+1300)

Harbaugh reached Super Bowl 47 in his second season with the 49ers, ultimately losing a close one to his brother John and the Ravens. Could similar magic strike again in Harbaugh's second season with the Chargers? Sure. But there appear to be too many obstacles to overcome — those obstacles being the Chiefs, Ravens, Bills, Bengals and perhaps even the Broncos and Texans. If you're a diehard fan, go ahead and sprinkle a few bucks on the Bolts. But we're officially laying off this one.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET: OMARION HAMPTON TO WIN OFFENSIVE ROY (+1400)

The Chargers used their first-round draft pick on Hampton, a physical downhill runner from North Carolina who some thought could be taken ahead of Boise State's Ashton Jeanty (who went to Las Vegas at No. 6 overall). Hampton will compete for carries with ex-Steeler Najee Harris. But Harbaugh loves to pound the football, something he'll likely do even more this season with an improved offensive line. Jeanty is the top betting choice for Offensive Rookie of the Year at +250, but Hampton's preseason price presents real value.

KIRBY LEE-IMAGN IMAGES

AFC WEST

DENVER

BRONCOS

BY BOYCE GARRISON

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 10-8
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 12-6

Bo Nix

Year No. 2 was a mixed bag for Bo Nix in college. His second season at Auburn mirrored his mediocre freshman year, but his second season at Oregon was spectacular, turning the quarterback from a mid-round draft selection into a 2024 first-round pick.

Nix then played a big part in Denver ending its nine-year playoff drought, even helping the Broncos to an early wild-card lead at Buffalo before the wheels came off in a 31-7 defeat.

Will Nix continue to progress in his second NFL season, or will he take a step back?

This is the biggest question the Broncos face in 2025.

His talent is unquestioned, but he carries a heavy burden with a demanding coach.

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	Tennessee	4:05
Sept. 14	at Indianapolis	4:05
Sept. 21	at LA Chargers	4:05
Sept. 29	Cincinnati	8:15
Oct. 5	at Philadelphia	1:00
Oct. 12	NY Jets (London)	9:30 a.m.
Oct. 19	N.Y. Giants	4:05
Oct. 26	Dallas	4:25
Nov. 2	at Houston	1:00
Nov. 6	Las Vegas	8:15
Nov. 16	Kansas City	4:25
Nov. 23	BYE	
Nov. 30	at Washington	8:20
Dec. 7	at Las Vegas	4:05
Dec. 14	Green Bay	4:25
Dec. 21	Jacksonville	4:05
Dec. 25	at Kansas City	8:15
Jan. 4	LA Chargers	TBD

POWER RATING

82.0

T-13 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

42.45

NO. 19 TOUGHEST OF 32

2025 WIN TOTAL: 9.5 (OV +115/UN -135)

Denver has the 13th-easiest schedule based on its opponents' projected win totals. It's also the Broncos' turn to play nine home games and eight on the road. Yet the nagging question about Nix's ability to make the critical "second-year leap" leaves us in a quandary. Can coach Sean Payton nurture Nix's talent and push him to the next level?

Payton had a healthy Drew Brees in 12 of his 15 seasons in New Orleans, and yet the Saints missed the playoffs in five of those years while averaging just 7.2 wins. Newsflash: Nix isn't Brees. So in what will be a tough division, Under 9.5 wins looks like the smart bet.

ODDS TO WIN AFC WEST: (+340)

There's little value at this number, with the Chiefs picked to win the division (again) and Broncos sporting the same projected win total as the Chargers. Sure, Denver's window is open with Nix still on his rookie contract. But with Kansas City still residing in the AFC West, it's not wide open. Invest your bankroll elsewhere.

ODDS TO WIN SUPER BOWL: (+1300)

Even with Brees at quarterback for all those years in New Orleans, Payton's Saints won only one Super Bowl and lost their other two NFC Championship Game appearances. It would take a lot of fortuitous bounces for Denver to win its fourth Super Bowl — and in this division, it appears there's only enough luck for the Chiefs. Hard pass.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET: BO NIX TO LEAD NFL IN PASSING YARDS (+3900)

Despite finishing 12th in passing yards as a rookie, Nix enters 2025 trailing 17 quarterbacks on FanDuel's odds board for this prop. That seems low, considering Brees won seven passing titles when teamed with Payton in New Orleans (including two in their first three years).

If Nix takes another step forward in his sophomore campaign — and newcomers Evan Engram (free agency) and Pat Bryant (draft) produce — there's a chance this bet will still be live come December. Which means there's a chance for a sizable return on investment.

KIRBY LEE-IMAGN IMAGES

LAS VEGAS

RAIDERS

AFC WEST

BY BOYCE GARRISON

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 4-13

AGAINST THE SPREAD: 7-9-1

Maxx Crosby

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	at New England	1:00
Sept. 15	L.A. Chargers	10:00
Sept. 21	at Washington	1:00
Sept. 28	Chicago	4:25
Oct. 5	at Indianapolis	1:00
Oct. 12	Tennessee	4:05
Oct. 19	at Kansas City	1:00
Oct. 26	BYE	
Nov. 2	Jacksonville	4:05
Nov. 6	at Denver	8:15
Nov. 17	Dallas	8:15
Nov. 23	Cleveland	4:05
Nov. 30	at L.A. Chargers	4:25
Dec. 7	Denver	4:05
Dec. 14	at Philadelphia	1:00
Dec. 21	at Houston	4:25
TBD	N.Y. Giants	
Jan. 4	Kansas City	TBD

POWER RATING

77.0

NO. 26 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

43.09

NO. 14 TOUGHEST OF 32

John Spytek helped build a Super Bowl-winning roster in Tampa Bay, but the Las Vegas Raiders' new GM has a big rebuild ahead with a team that has won just 18 of 51 games the past three seasons.

One of Spytek's first moves was his boldest: He hired defensive-minded Pete Carroll as his head coach. Then Chip Kelly was brought on board as the offensive coordinator.

Kelly will have some talent to work with, as the Raiders traded for veteran quarterback Geno Smith and drafted running back Ashton Jeanty with the No. 6 overall pick. Both join Brock Bowers, who needed just one NFL season to establish himself as the game's best tight end.

2025 WIN TOTAL: 7.5 (OV +140/UN -165)

It's clear that oddsmakers and bettors believe the Raiders are headed for another losing season in 2025. Not only is the team's projected win total below the .500 mark, but Under 7.5 carries some significant juice.

There is, however, reason to at least consider betting on Las Vegas to exceed expectations: In his 18 seasons as an NFL head coach, Carroll's teams have finished with fewer than eight victories just four times. The Jets went 6-10 in Carroll's rookie season in 1994, and three of his Seattle squads finished with exactly seven wins.

The Raiders do have the 14th-hardest schedule — pretty harsh for a team that finished 4-13 a year ago. But they play nine of 17 games at home. That — and the solid plus-money odds — makes Over 7.5 appealing.

ODDS TO WIN AFC WEST (+1200)

With three legitimate playoff contenders for Las Vegas to climb over, the value in this wager simply isn't there. Also, Carroll's teams performed pretty close to the expected Pythagorean win total in his first seasons with the Jets, Patriots and Seahawks. So the Raiders winning the AFC West for the first time in 23 years likely is not in the cards.

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL (+5000)

Stranger things have happened, and at 50/1 odds, a small wager would bring a massive return. Just know this: Geno Smith has started just one playoff game in his 11-year career, so even taking +310 odds on the Raiders to make the playoffs is risky.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET:

MAXX CROSBY TO WIN NFL DEFENSIVE POY (+1200)

Crosby was fourth in DPOY voting in 2023, when he had 14.5 sacks. Then injuries limited him to 12 games a year ago. A rebound is expected, but the tenacious defensive end needs someone on the other side to take some of the heat. That could end up being Malcolm Koonce, who was in line to have a monster 2024 before suffering a season-ending injury right before Week 1. Bet on Carroll to get the most out of this defense (and for Crosby to do the most damage).

NATHAN RAY SEEBECK-IMAGN IMAGES

AFC SCHEDULES

EAST

BUFFALO BILLS

Week 1: Sept. 7 vs. Baltimore
Week 2: Sept. 14 at N.Y. Jets
Week 3: Sept. 18 vs. Miami
Week 4: Sept. 28 vs. New Orleans
Week 5: Oct. 5 vs. New England
Week 6: Oct. 13 at Atlanta
Week 7: BYE
Week 8: Oct. 26 at Carolina
Week 9: Nov. 2 vs. Kansas City
Week 10: Nov. 9 at Miami
Week 11: Nov. 16 vs. Tampa Bay
Week 12: Nov. 20 at Houston
Week 13: Nov. 30 at Pittsburgh
Week 14: Dec. 7 vs. Cincinnati
Week 15: Dec. 14 at Patriots
Week 16: Dec. 21 at Cleveland
Week 17: Dec. 28 vs. Philadelphia
Week 18: Jan. 4 vs. N.Y. Jets

MIAMI DOLPHINS

Week 1: Sept. 7 at Indianapolis
Week 2: Sept. 14 vs. New England
Week 3: Sept. 18 at Buffalo
Week 4: Sept. 29 vs. N.Y. Jets
Week 5: Oct. 5 at Carolina
Week 6: Oct. 12 vs. L.A.
Week 7: Oct. 19 at Cleveland
Week 8: Oct. 26 at Atlanta
Week 9: Oct. 30 vs. Baltimore
Week 10: Nov. 9 vs. Buffalo
Week 11: Nov. 16 vs. Washington (Madrid)
Week 12: BYE
Week 13: Nov. 30 vs. New Orleans
Week 14: Dec. 7 at N.Y. Jets
Week 15: Dec. 15 at Pittsburgh
Week 16: Dec. 21 vs. Cincinnati
Week 17: Dec. 28 vs. Tampa Bay
Week 18: Jan. 4 at New England

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

Week 1: Sept. 7 vs. Las Vegas
Week 2: Sept. 14 at Miami
Week 3: Sept. 21 vs. Pittsburgh
Week 4: Sept. 28 vs. Carolina
Week 5: Oct. 5 at Buffalo
Week 6: Oct. 12 at New Orleans
Week 7: Oct. 19 at Tennessee
Week 8: Oct. 26 vs. Cleveland
Week 9: Nov. 2 vs. Atlanta
Week 10: Nov. 9 at Tampa Bay
Week 11: Nov. 13 vs. N.Y. Jets
Week 12: Nov. 23 at Cincinnati
Week 13: Dec. 1 vs. N.Y. Giants
Week 14: BYE
Week 15: Dec. 14 vs. Buffalo
Week 16: Dec. 21 at Baltimore
Week 17: Dec. 28 at N.Y. Jets
Week 18: Jan. 4 vs. Miami

NEW YORK JETS

Week 1: Sept. 7 vs. Pittsburgh
Week 2: Sept. 14 vs. Buffalo
Week 3: Sept. 21 at Tampa Bay
Week 4: Sept. 29 at Miami
Week 5: Oct. 5 vs. Dallas
Week 6: Oct. 12 vs. Denver (London)
Week 7: Oct. 19 vs. Carolina
Week 8: Oct. 26 at Cincinnati
Week 9: BYE
Week 10: Nov. 9 vs. Cleveland
Week 11: Nov. 13 at New England
Week 12: Nov. 23 at Baltimore
Week 13: Nov. 30 vs. Atlanta
Week 14: Dec. 7 vs. Miami
Week 15: Dec. 14 at Jacksonville
Week 16: Dec. 21 at New Orleans
Week 17: Dec. 28 vs. New England
Week 18: Jan. 4 at Buffalo

WEST

DENVER BRONCOS

Week 1: Sept. 7 vs. Tennessee
Week 2: Sept. 14 at Indianapolis
Week 3: Sept. 21 at L.A. Chargers
Week 4: Sept. 29 vs. Cincinnati
Week 5: Oct. 5 at Philadelphia
Week 6: Oct. 12 vs. N.Y. Jets (London)
Week 7: Oct. 19 vs. N.Y. Giants
Week 8: Oct. 26 vs. Dallas
Week 9: Nov. 2 at Houston
Week 10: Nov. 6 vs. Las Vegas
Week 11: Nov. 16 vs. Kansas City
Week 12: BYE
Week 13: Nov. 30 at Washington
Week 14: Dec. 7 at Las Vegas
Week 15: Dec. 14 vs. Green Bay
Week 16: Dec. 21 vs. Jacksonville
Week 17: Dec. 25 at Kansas City
Week 18: Jan. 4 vs. L.A. Chargers

KANSAS CITY CHIEFS

Week 1: Sept. 5 vs. L.A. Chargers (Brazil)
Week 2: Sept. 14 vs. Eagles
Week 3: Sept. 21 at N.Y. Giants
Week 4: Sept. 28 vs. Baltimore
Week 5: Oct. 6 at Jacksonville
Week 6: Oct. 12 vs. Detroit
Week 7: Oct. 19 vs. Las Vegas
Week 8: Oct. 27 vs. Washington
Week 9: Nov. 2 at Buffalo
Week 10: BYE
Week 11: Nov. 16 at Denver
Week 12: Nov. 23 vs. Indianapolis
Week 13: Nov. 28 at Dallas
Week 14: Dec. 7 vs. Houston
Week 15: Dec. 14 vs. L.A. Chargers
Week 16: Dec. 21 at Tennessee
Week 17: Dec. 25 vs. Denver
Week 18: Jan. 4 at Las Vegas

LAS VEGAS RAIDERS

Week 1: Sept. 7 at New England
Week 2: Sept. 15 vs. L.A. Chargers
Week 3: Sept. 21 at Washington
Week 4: Sept. 28 vs. Chicago
Week 5: Oct. 5 at. Indianapolis
Week 6: Oct. 12 vs. Tennessee
Week 7: Oct. 19 at Kansas City
Week 8: BYE
Week 9: Nov. 2 vs. Jacksonville
Week 10: Nov. 6 at Denver
Week 11: Nov. 17 vs. Dallas
Week 12: Nov. 23 vs. Cleveland
Week 13: Nov. 30 at L.A. Chargers
Week 14: Dec. 7 vs. Denver
Week 15: Dec. 14 at Philadelphia
Week 16: Dec. 21 at Houston
Week 17: Dec. 27 or 28 vs. N.Y. Giants
Week 18: Jan. 4 vs. Chiefs

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS

Week 1: Sept. 5 vs. Kansas City (Brazil)
Week 2: Sept. 15 at Las Vegas
Week 3: Sept. 21 vs. Denver
Week 4: Sept. 28 at N.Y. Giants
Week 5: Oct. 5 vs. Washington
Week 6: Oct. 12 at Miami
Week 7: Oct. 19 vs. Indianapolis
Week 8: Oct. 23 vs. Minnesota
Week 9: Nov. 2 at Tennessee
Week 10: Nov. 9 vs. Pittsburgh
Week 11: Nov. 16 at Jacksonville
Week 12: BYE
Week 13: Nov. 30 vs. Las Vegas
Week 14: Dec. 8 vs. Philadelphia
Week 15: Dec.14 at Kansas City
Week 16: Dec. 21 at Dallas
Week 17: Dec. 28 vs. Houston
Week 18: Jan. 4 at Denver

NORTH

BALTIMORE RAVENS

Week 1: Sept. 7 at Buffalo
Week 2: Sept. 14 vs. Cleveland
Week 3: Sept. 22 vs. Detroit
Week 4: Sept. 28 at Kansas City
Week 5: Oct. 5 vs. Houston
Week 6: Oct. 12 vs. L.A. Rams
Week 7: BYE
Week 8: Oct. 26 vs. Chicago
Week 9: Oct. 30 at Miami
Week 10: Nov. 9 at Minnesota
Week 11: Nov. 16 at Cleveland
Week 12: Nov. 23 vs. N.Y. Jets
Week 13: Nov. 27 vs. Cincinnati
Week 14: Dec. 7 vs. Pittsburgh
Week 15: Dec. 14 at Cincinnati
Week 16: Dec. 21 vs. New England
Week 17: Dec. 27 or 28 at Green Bay
Week 18: Jan. 4 at Pittsburgh

CINCINNATI BENGALS

Week 1: Sept. 7 at Cleveland
Week 2: Sept. 14 vs. Jacksonville
Week 3: Sept. 21 at Minnesota
Week 4: Sept. 29 at Denver
Week 5: Oct. 5 vs. Detroit
Week 6: Oct. 12 at Green Bay
Week 7: Oct. 16 vs. Pittsburgh
Week 8: Oct. 26 vs. N.Y. Jets
Week 9: Nov. 2 vs. Chicago
Week 10: BYE
Week 11: Nov. 16 at Pittsburgh
Week 12: Nov. 23 vs. New England
Week 13: Nov. 27 at Baltimore
Week 14: Dec. 7 at Buffalo
Week 15: Dec. 14 vs. Baltimore
Week 16: Dec. 21 at Miami
Week 17: Dec. 27 or 28 vs. Arizona
Week 18: Jan. 4 vs. Cleveland

CLEVELAND BROWNS

Week 1: Sept. 7 vs. Cincinnati
Week 2: Sept. 14 at Baltimore
Week 3: Sept. 21 vs. Green Bay
Week 4: Sept. 28 at Detroit
Week 5: Oct. 5 vs. Minnesota (London)
Week 6: Oct. 12 at Pittsburgh
Week 7: Oct. 19 vs. Miami
Week 8: Oct. 26 at New England
Week 9: BYE
Week 10: Nov. 9 at N.Y. Jets
Week 11: Nov. 16 vs. Baltimore
Week 12: Nov. 23 at Las Vegas
Week 13: Nov. 30 vs. San Francisco
Week 14: Dec. 7 vs. Tennessee
Week 15: Dec. 14 at Chicago
Week 16: Dec. 21 vs. Buffalo
Week 17: Dec. 28 vs. Pittsburgh
Week 18: Jan. 4 at Cincinnati

PITTSBURGH STEELERS

Week 1: Sept. 7 at N.Y. Jets
Week 2: Sept. 14 vs. Seattle
Week 3: Sept. 21 at New England
Week 4: Sept. 28 vs. Minnesota (Dublin)
Week 5: BYE
Week 6: Oct. 12 vs. Cleveland
Week 7: Oct. 16 at Cincinnati
Week 8: Oct. 26 vs. Green Bay
Week 9: Nov. 2 vs. Indianapolis
Week 10: Nov. 9 at L.A. Chargers
Week 11: Nov. 16 vs. Cincinnati
Week 12: Nov. 23 at Chicago
Week 13: Nov. 30 vs. Buffalo
Week 14: Dec. 7 at Baltimore
Week 15: Dec. 15 vs. Miami
Week 16: Dec. 21 at Detroit
Week 17: Dec. 28 at Cleveland
Week 18: Jan. 4 vs. Baltimore

SOUTH

HOUSTON TEXANS

Week 1: Sept. 7 at L.A. Rams
Week 2: Sept. 15 vs. Tampa Bay
Week 3: Sept. 21 at Jacksonville
Week 4: Sept. 28 vs. Tennessee
Week 5: Oct. 5 at Baltimore
Week 6: BYE
Week 7: Oct. 20 at Seattle
Week 8: Oct. 26 vs. San Francisco
Week 9: Nov. 2 vs. Denver
Week 10: Nov. 9 vs. Jacksonville
Week 11: Nov. 16 at Tennessee
Week 12: Nov. 20 vs. Buffalo
Week 13: Nov. 30 at Indianapolis
Week 14: Dec. 7 at Kansas City
Week 15: Dec.14 vs. Arizona
Week 16: Dec. 21 vs. Las Vegas
Week 17: Dec 28 at L.A. Chargers
Week 18: Jan. 4 vs. Indianapolis

INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

Week 1: Sept 7 vs. Miami
Week 2: Sept. 14 vs. Denver
Week 3: Sept. 21 at Tennessee
Week 4: Sept. 28 at L.A. Rams
Week 5: Oct. 5 vs. Las Vegas
Week 6: Oct. 12 vs. Arizona
Week 7: Oct. 19 at L.A. Chargers
Week 8: Oct. 26 vs. Tennessee
Week 9: Nov. 2 at Pittsburgh
Week 10: Nov. 9 vs. Atlanta (Berlin)
Week 11: BYE
Week 12: Nov. 23 at Kansas City
Week 13: Nov. 30 vs. Houston
Week 14: Dec. 7 at Jacksonville
Week 15: Dec. 14 at Seattle
Week 16: Dec. 22 vs. San Francisco
Week 17: Dec. 28 vs. Jacksonville
Week 18: Jan. 4 at Houston

JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS

Week 1: Sept. 7 vs. Carolina
Week 2: Sept. 14 at Cincinnati
Week 3: Sept. 21 vs. Houston
Week 4: Sept. 28 at San Francisco
Week 5: Oct. 6 vs. Kansas City
Week 6: Oct. 12 vs. Seattle
Week 7: Oct. 19 vs. L.A. Rams
Week 8: BYE
Week 9: Nov. 2 at Las Vegas
Week 10: Nov. 9 at Houston
Week 11: Nov. 16 vs. L.A. Chargers
Week 12: Nov. 23 at Arizona
Week 13: Nov. 30 at Tennessee
Week 14: Dec. 7 vs. Indianapolis
Week 15: Dec. 14 vs. N.Y. Jets
Week 16: Dec. 21 at Denver
Week 17: Dec. 28 at Indianapolis
Week 18: Jan. 4 vs. Tennessee

TENNESSEE TITANS

Week 1: Sept. 7 at Denver
Week 2: Sept. 14 vs. L.A. Rams
Week 3: Sept. 21 vs. Indianapolis
Week 4: Sept. 28 at Houston
Week 5: Oct. 05 at Arizona
Week 6: Oct. 12 at Las Vegas
Week 7: Oct. 19vs. New England
Week 8: Oct. 26 at Indianapolis
Week 9: Nov. 2 vs. L.A. Chargers
Week 10: BYE
Week 11: Nov. 16 vs. Houston
Week 12: Nov. 23 vs. Seattle
Week 13: Nov. 30 vs. Jacksonville
Week 14: Dec. 7 at Cleveland
Week 15: TBD at San Francisco
Week 16: Dec. 21 vs. Kansas City
Week 17: Dec. 28 vs. New Orleans
Week 18: Jan. 4 at Jacksonville

CALLING ALL WHISKEY LOVERS

From bourbon to Scotch to Japanese whisky, it's a spirited world—and it keeps getting bigger. Whether you're just a burgeoning fan or have a well-stocked bar, ***Men's Journal*** is here to help you find your perfect dram.

This fall, we're launching our own curated **Whiskey Shop**, which will feature everything from everyday pours to exclusive single barrels.

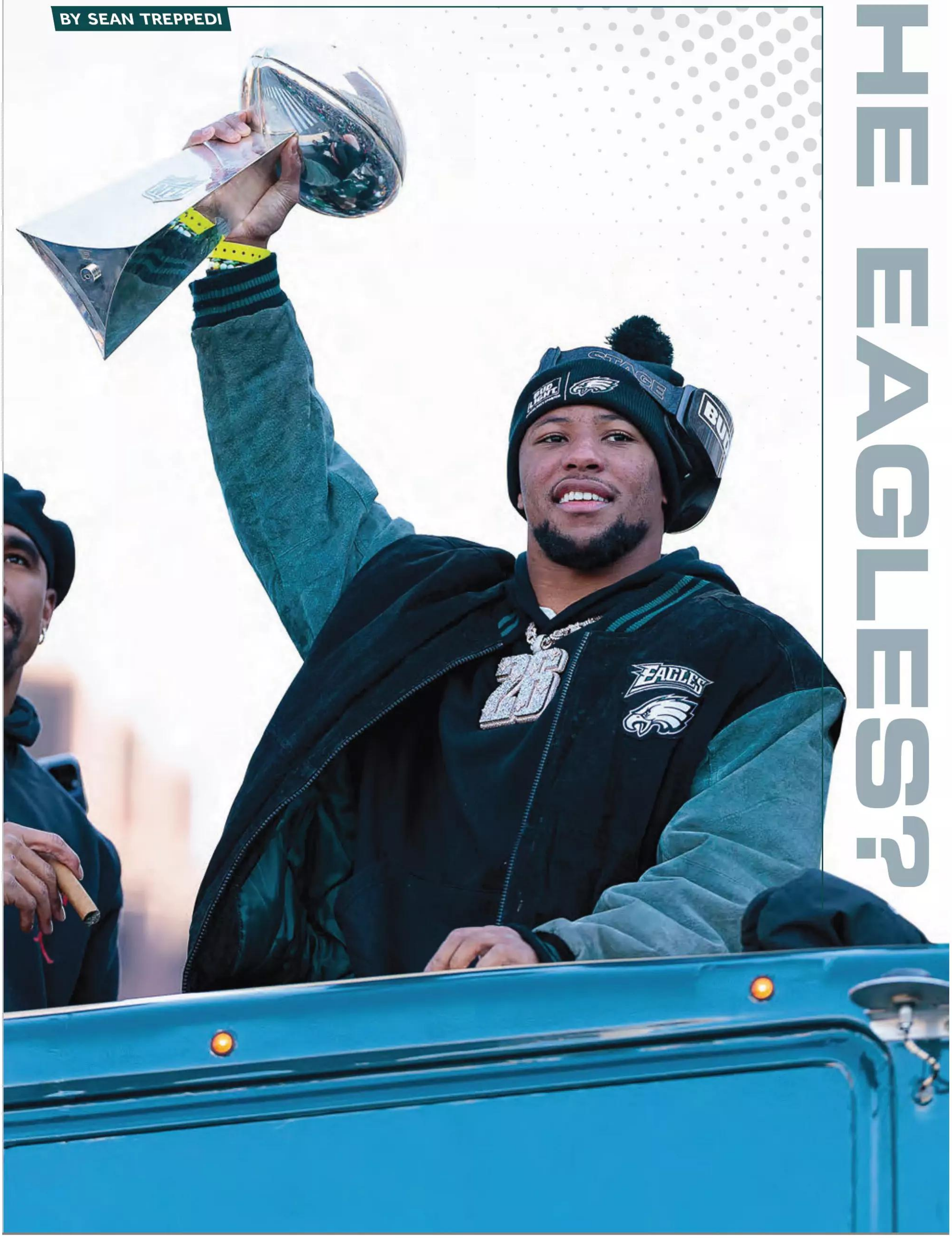
Sign up for our Whiskey Wednesday newsletter for updates—and to receive our experts' favorite new bottles to buy, the classics we're obsessing over, and the underrated releases to check out.

MEN'S JOURNAL

CHEERS!

WHO CAN BEAT THE EAGLES?

BY SEAN TREPPEDI



CAEAN COUTO-IMAGN IMAGES

After head coach Nick Sirianni finally led the Philadelphia Eagles to NFL glory, the defending champs enter the 2025 season as coNsensus +300 favorites to win their third NFC Championship in four seasons.

It took four years of rebranding the franchise, but Sirianni's Birds tyrannized the league with elite offensive line play, an explosive passing game, a rejuvenated running back, and the notorious Tush Push.

Beyond all of that, Sirianni crafted and executed adaptable game plans. All of it culminated Feb. 9, when the Eagles' 40-22 torching of the Kansas City Chiefs officially legitimized a once volatile group.

All of which leads to this question: Can Philadelphia reach back-to-back Super Bowls for the first time in franchise history?

Oddsmakers certainly believe so. But as dominant as the Eagles were last season — and as much as they deserve to be the frontrunner entering 2025 — their path to another NFC title isn't void of potholes.

In fact, as many as five teams — Detroit, Green Bay, San Francisco, Washington, and the Los Angeles Rams — join Philadelphia with NFC Championship odds of 10-to-1 or less.

So where does the value lie heading into training camp? I'm not sold that the answer is the Eagles. For a few reasons.

Philadelphia jumped from the eight-best rushing offense in 2023 to No. 2, all thanks to Saquon Barkley. The erstwhile Giants running back went off for 2,005 rushing yards (and, perhaps ,more surprisingly, stayed healthy).

While Barkley figures to be a dynamic X factor again in 2025, regression is almost inevitable — and not just in the regular season. Remember, Barkley averaged 124.8 rushing yards and scored five touchdowns in the Eagles' Super Bowl run.

Can they realistically expect that again come January?

As for the challengers to Philly's throne, the 49ers are back in the conversation after a season plagued with injuries and discombobulation resulted in a shocking last-place NFC West finish.

San Francisco ranges anywhere from third to sixth in the NFC Championship futures market, with odds as high as +1100. While quarterback Brock Purdy has secured his bag, it's reasonable to wonder if he'll earn his dough with no Deebo Samuel (and an injury-prone Christian McCaffrey).

KEVIN JAIRAJ-IMAGN IMAGES

Then there's Dan Campbell's resilient and inspiring Lions, who are the +500 second choice behind the Eagles to win the NFC. The problem with Campbell and the Lions is that the moment always seems to bite them.

So I'm turning my attention to the NFC's newest kid on the block: the Washington Commanders. From ownership to coaching to the quarterback, this rebuilt franchise proved too encouraging in 2024 to believe it was one-year fluke.

About that quarterback: Jayden Daniels had an historic rookie season, even challenging Lamar Jackson for the most rushing yards among quarterbacks. He also stood tall in his first postseason, completing 65.8% of his passes for an average of 274 yards in three games.

WhileDanielsawakenedalong-dormant offense, defensive-minded first-y ear head coach Dan Quinn helped Washington jump from dead last in scoring defense in 2023 to 18th. Even more impressively, it went from dead last in passing defense to third.

Bottom line: This is not your father's Washington football franchise. And with a price as high as +950, it's hard to not jump on a team that's riding high after stunningly ending a 31-year NFC Championship Game drought.

2025 NFC CHAMPIONSHIP ODDS

TEAM	ODDS
Philadelphia Eagles	+350
Detroit Lions	+500
Los Angeles Rams	+900
Washington Commanders	+950
Green Bay Packers	+1000
San Francisco 49ers	+1100
Tampa Bay Buccaneers	+1200
Minnesota Vikings	+1300
Chicago Bears	1900
Dallas Cowboys	+1900
Arizona Cardinals	+2100
Atlanta Falcons	+2700
Seattle Seahawks	+2800
Carolina Panthers	+4400
New York Giants	+12000
New Orleans Saints	+15000

NFC EAST

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES

BY RYAN REYNOLDS

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 18-3
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 14-7

Jalen Carter

The Philadelphia Eagles are 39-12 over the past three seasons, with two Super Bowl appearances and one championship during that span.

And while the Super Bowl 59 champs had some roster turnover in the offseason, no front office does a better job preparing for the future. Which is why the Eagles will begin the 2025 season as one of the favorites to win another title.

2025 WIN TOTAL: 11.5 (OV +115/UN -135)

If there's one drawback to winning a Super Bowl, it's that the following season's schedule is no picnic. Such is the case for Philadelphia, which must navigate the NFL's eighth-toughest schedule, with 11 games against 2024 playoff teams.

The good news for the Eagles: They've averaged 13 wins over the past three years. The not-so-good news: They're a regression candidate, having finished 5-1 last season in one-score regular season games that quarterback Jalen Hurts started and finished.

That being said, I project Philadelphia to go 12-5, making this a lean to the Over — but with one strategic caveat: The Eagles face Washington in the regular-season finale in what could be a high-leverage game. Philly has a history of resting starters in the final week if nothing is on the line. So if you invest in Over 11.5, be sure to look for hedge and/or middling opportunities in that Week 18 matchup.

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 4	Dallas	8:20
Sept. 14	at Kansas City	4:25
Sept. 21	LA Rams	1:00
Sept. 28	at Tampa Bay	1:00
Oct. 5	Denver	1:00
Oct. 9	at NY Giants	8:15
Oct. 19	at Minnesota	1:00
Oct. 26	NY Giants	1:00
Nov. 3	BYE	
Nov. 10	at Green Bay	8:15
Nov. 16	Detroit	8:20
Nov. 23	at Dallas	4:25
Nov. 28	Chicago	3:00
Dec. 8	at LA Chargers	8:15
Dec. 14	Las Vegas	1:00
TBD	at Washington	
Dec. 28	at Buffalo	4:25
Jan. 4	Washington	TBD

POWER RATING
87.5
NO. 1 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
43.72
NO. 8 TOUGHEST OF 32

ODDS TO WIN NFC EAST: (-135)

The NFC East hasn't had a repeat winner since the Eagles won four straight division titles from 2001-2004. It's a crazy stat — but one that has zero bearing on who will win the division this season.

Philadelphia still has the NFC East's best roster by a significant margin. But that doesn't mean you should lay odds on the Eagles to break the two-decade "no-repeat" streak. Rather, the smarter play is Over 11.5 wins. Not only is the price better, but the bet still has a chance to cash even if Washington steals the division.

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL (+370)

There is nothing unreasonable about picking the Eagles to reach their third Super Bowl in four years. But that doesn't mean you should — at least not now. Even if Philadelphia comes out hot, this NFC Championship price isn't going to get much shorter. More can go wrong than right on a season-long +370 futures bet.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET: JALEN CARTER TO WIN DEFENSIVE POY (+3300)

This award usually goes to a premium pass rusher. Carter meets that criteria, as the third-year pro is already one of the league's most disruptive players. If he has a big opening night against Dallas — which is entirely possible — his DPOY odds could get short in a hurry.

BILL STREICHER-IMAGN IMAGES

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 14-6
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 12-7-1

WASHINGTON COMMANDERS

BY RYAN REYNOLDS

Terry McLaurin

Jayden Daniels makes the Washington Commanders an NFC contender, even with an average roster and an overachieving defense that's likely to regress in 2025. As elecrifying as Daniels was during his historic rookie campaign, though, it's more likely than not he will take a step back this season. And by extension, the same is true for multiple position groups.

Thing about it: Opponents now have a year's worth of film and a full offseason to study Daniels and OC Kliff Kingsbury's offense. Daniels might already be the NFC's best quarterback, but the element of surprise is gone.

2025 WIN TOTAL: 9.5 (OV -110/UN -110)

Laremy Tunsil is a nice upgrade at left tackle, and Swiss Army Knife Deebo Samuel is a fascinating fit in Kingsbury's creative offense … if the wide receiver can return to form. Even with those additions, Washington has a middling roster that is overly reliant on Daniels carrying most of the load.

Keep in mind that the 2024 Commanders were 7-1 in one-score games that Daniels started and finished, making them a prime regression candidate. In the end, I have Washington penciled in at 9-8, which makes for contrarian — and ever-so-slight — lean to the Under.

ODDS TO WIN NFC EAST (+230)

If you're bullish on the Commanders, it's logical to lean into their upside. They have the 16th-most difficult schedule, which is an edge over their three division rivals. Throw in a top-tier coaching staff, the division's best QB and that soft schedule, and there's solid value in Washington to win the NFC East at +230 odds.

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL: (+1000)

It's difficult to believe given the perception of this franchise exactly a year ago, but Washington is the consensus fourth choice to win the NFC. On the surface, that's good value for a team that reached the 2024 NFC title game. However, it's important to note that several NFC contenders have a pure talent advantage over the Commanders.

POWER RATING
83.0
T-9 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
42.69
NO. 16 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	N.Y. Giants	1:00
Sept. 11	at Green Bay	8:15
Sept. 21	Las Vegas	1:00
Sept. 28	at Atlanta	1:00
Oct. 5	at L.A. Chargers	4:25
Oct. 13	Chicago	8:15
Oct. 19	at Dallas	4:25
Oct. 27	at Kansas City	8:15
Nov. 2	Seattle	8:20
Nov. 9	Detroit	4:25
Nov. 16	Miami (Madrid)	9:30 a.m.
Nov. 23	BYE	
Nov. 30	Denver	8:20
Dec. 7	at Minnesota	1:00
Dec. 14	at N.Y. Giants	1:00
TBD	Philadelphia	TBD
Dec. 25	Dallas	1:00
Jan. 4	at Philadelphia	TBD

FAVORITE FUTURES BET:

TERRY MCLAURIN: OVER 1000.5 RECEIVING YARDS (-114)

McLaurin has cleared 1,000 yards each of the last five seasons — and in four of those, he caught passes from a below-average quarterback. Even when he fell short of 1,000 receiving yards as a 2019 rookie, McLaurin still got to 919 — in just 14 games. Having proven to be quarterback proof, McLaurin is well-positioned to beat this number even if Daniels misses time.

TIM HEITMAN-IMAGN IMAGES

NFC EAST

DALLAS COWBOYS

BY RYAN REYNOLDS

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 7-10
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 7-10

Dak Prescott

The Cowboys are just a year removed from three consecutive 12-5 seasons. They still roster household names like Dak Prescott, Micah Parsons and CeeDee Lamb, but they've bled noteworthy talent for multiple offseasons in a row.

On top of that, in a head-scratching move, they ditched coach Mike McCarthy in favor of … Brian Schottenheimer. Anyway you slice it, there's a good chance we've already seen the best of the Prescott-led Cowboys.

2025 WIN TOTAL: 7.5 (OV -140/UN +120)

Dallas has strengths in important spots, but the roster has devolved into a collection of "stars and scrubs". Aside from quarterback, one could argue the Giants' roster has caught up to (if not surpassed) the Cowboys' in pure talent. The biggest edge Dallas has is Prescott, who remains a top-10 talent at the sport's most important position.

Still, the Cowboys have the league's 13th-toughest schedule, with matchups against 10 teams that made the playoffs in 2024 (only the Eagles and Lions have more). So I have Dallas projected to match their 7-10 record from last year, which means a lean to the Under. Prescott is the only element keeping that "lean" from being a "best bet".

ODDS TO WIN NFC EAST: (+480)

The Cowboys and Eagles have swapped division crowns each of the last four seasons, but things have changed in the NFC East. Not only has Philadelphia become the unquestioned class of the entire NFC, but Washington has leap-frogged Dallas. As such, the Cowboys are as likely to finish fourth in the division as they are to win it, making +480 odds too short to play.

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL (+2000)

Prescott is at least in the conversation for best quarterback in the NFC, and the addition of wide receiver George Pickens gives him a legit weapon to pair with CeeDee Lamb. Ideally, you should get better than 19/1 odds for a team with a 7.5 win-total projection. That being said, the Cowboys could be dangerous if they sneak into the postseason.

POWER RATING
81.0
T-16 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
43.11
NO. 13 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 4	at Philadelphia	8:20
Sept. 14	N.Y. Giants	1:00
Sept. 21	at Chicago	4:25
Sept. 28	Green Bay	8:20
Oct. 5	at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Oct. 12	at Carolina	1:00
Oct. 19	Washington	4:25
Oct. 26	at Denver	4:25
Nov. 3	Arizona	8:15
Nov. 10	BYE	
Nov. 17	at Las Vegas	8:15
Nov. 23	Philadelphia	4:25
Nov. 27	Kansas City	4:30
Dec. 4	at Detroit	8:15
Dec. 14	Minnesota	8:20
Dec. 21	L.A. Chargers	1:00
Dec. 25	at Washington	1:00
Jan. 4	at N.Y. Giants	TBD

FAVORITE FUTURES BET: DAK PRESCOTT TO WIN MVP (+4000)

Rather than gamble on Dallas to reach the Super Bowl for the first time in three decades, roll with Prescott to win MVP (at exactly double the potential return). He was in the conversation late in the 2023 season, showing he's capable of MVP-caliber production. Bottom line: If Dallas significantly exceeds expectations this year, chances are Prescott will be the primary reason.

BRETT DAVIS-IMAGN IMAGES

NEW YORK GIANTS

BY RYAN REYNOLDS

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 3-14
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 5-12

Malik Nabers

The New York Giants' embarrassing 3-14 campaign in 2024 wasn't just a one-off; it was the continuation of the franchise's worst multi-year run since the '70s. Big Blue has produced just two winning seasons in the last dozen years, and has won five or fewer games in five of the last eight seasons.

On the bright side, a busy (and potentially impactful) offseason in free agency and the draft makes the Giants a more dangerous outfit. Alas, they also drew the league's most difficult schedule. That combination makes New York one of the toughest teams to peg heading into the season.

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	at Washington	1:00
Sept. 14	at Dallas	1:00
Sept. 21	Kansas City	8:20
Sept. 28	L.A. Chargers	1:00
Oct. 5	at New Orleans	1:00
Oct. 9	Philadelphia	8:15
Oct. 19	at Denver	4:05
Oct. 26	at Philadelphia	1:00
Nov. 2	San Francisco	1:00
Nov. 9	at Chicago	1:00
Nov. 16	Green Bay	1:00
Nov. 23	at Detroit	1:00
Dec. 1	at New England	8:15
Dec. 7	BYE	
Dec. 14	Washington	1:00
Dec. 21	Minnesota	1:00
TBD	at Las Vegas	TBD
Jan. 4	Dallas	TBD

POWER RATING
76.0
T-28 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
45.59
NO. 1 TOUGHEST OF 32

2025 WIN TOTAL: 5.5 (OVER -125/UNDER +145)

Russell Wilson isn't the most likable guy, but the veteran brings immediate stability to the quarterback position. And the additions of edge rusher (and No. 3 overall pick Abdul Carter), veteran safety Jevon Holland and cornerback Paulson Adebo give the Giants enough talent to field a top-10 defense (headlined by an elite pass rush). New York also should benefit from positive regression, as it went 1-7 in one-score games in 2024.

That's the good news. Here's the bad: The Giants play 10 games against 2024 playoff teams. That doesn't include tough, consecutive-week matchups with the 49ers (home) and Bears (road). Then there's the two annual clashes with the Cowboys, who have won 15 of the last 16 meetings (including eight in a row).

That loaded schedule and a potential QB carousel — journeyman Jameis Winston and rookie Jaxson Dart are on deck should Wilson stumble — makes the play here either Under 5.5 wins or pass.

ODDS TO WIN NFC EAST: (+3000)

New York has a roster that could potentially compete with Dallas, and it gave Washington two tough games last season. But it's very hard to envision the Giants jumping both teams, let alone the defending champion Eagles. If you're *that* bullish on Big Blue, take Over 7.5 on their alternate win total at +360 odds. Though not a recommendation, it's a more realistic wager to hit.

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL: (120/1)

New York's astronomically long odds to represent the NFC in the big game are for good reason. Likewise, its -1800 odds to miss the postseason offer no value. Two hard passes.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET: MALIK NABERS TO WIN OFFENSIVE POY (+3500)

Edge rusher Abdul Carter will be tough to beat in the Defensive Rookie of the Year race, but as the consensus favorite, there's little value at +250. Yes, team success is a key factor for Offensive Player of the Year voters. Still, Nabers is a mid-range longshot who could finish as the NFL's most productive pass catcher in 2025 if he develops a rapport with Wilson, Winston and/or Dart.

VINCENT CARCHIETTA-IMAGN IMAGES

NFC NORTH

DETROIT LIONS

BY RYAN REYNOLDS

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 15-3
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 12-6

Jared Goff

The Lions have posted three consecutive winning seasons for the first time in three decades. The last time Detroit enjoyed a four-year winning stretch: more than 70 years ago (1951-'54).

Barring a disaster, this once-moribund franchise should match that run in 2025. However, Dan Cambell lost both of his coordinators, leaving some to wonder if the Lions' window is beginning to close. Remember, the Eagles went from NFC champions in 2022 to missing the playoffs in 2023. Might Detroit suffer a similar fate this season with two new play-callers?

2025 WIN TOTAL: 10.5 (OV +105/UN -125)

Despite enduring bad injury luck on defense, Detroit managed to go 15-2 last year. Some talent was lost in the offseason, but restarting with a healthy roster mitigates those departures.

Unfortunately for the Lions, everything else points to a pullback. They have the league's second-most difficult schedule, with an NFL-high 11 games against 2024 playoff teams. They also are a candidate to regress after going 7-2 in one-score games.

Factor in the adjustment to two new coordinators, and I have Detroit pegged at 9-8. While that suggests a solid Under recommendation, it's actually more of a lean, as I tend to bet futures that I'm convinced can win by margin.

POWER RATING
84.0
NO. 5 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
45.47
NO. 2 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	at Green Bay	4:25
Sept. 14	Chicago	1:00
Sept. 22	at Baltimore	8:15
Sept. 28	Cleveland	1:00
Oct. 5	at Cincinnati	4:25
Oct. 12	at Kansas City	8:20
Oct. 20	Tampa Bay	7:00
Oct. 26	BYE	
Nov. 2	Minnesota	1:00
Nov. 9	at Washington	4:25
Nov. 16	at Philadelphia	8:20
Nov. 23	N.Y. Giants	1:00
Nov. 27	Green Bay	1:00
Dec. 4	Dallas	8:15
Dec. 14	at L.A. Rams	4:25
Dec. 21	Pittsburgh	4:25
Dec. 25	at Minnesota	4:30
Jan. 4	at Chicago	TBD

ODDS TO WIN NFC NORTH (+145)

The Lions are two-time defending division champions for the first time in modern history. That's one reason why they're solid favorites in this market. However, both the Bears (+550) and Vikings (+290) improved, and the Packers (+260) remain formidable. Translation: There's no value in betting Detroit to win football's best division at this paltry price.

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL (+500)

The Lions are the second favorite (behind Philadelphia) to represent the NFC in the Super Bowl, as they should be. But that doesn't mean you should place a wager at 5/1 odds. If you believe this is Detroit's year, either wait for a better in-season price or consider playing the moneyline during each playoff game and rolling over the winnings to the next.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET: JARED GOFF: WIN MVP (+3100)

When professional bettors dive into the futures market during the offseason, they're taking advantage of mispriced lines. So while Lions pass-rushing specialist Aidan Hutchinson has a better shot to win Defensive Player of the Year, there's no value at his +290 odds. Goff has been in the MVP hunt multiple times throughout his career, making a 31/1 MVP bet quite enticing.

LON HORWEDEL-IMAGN IMAGES

GREEN BAY

PACKERS

BY RYAN REYNOLDS

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 11-7
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 9-9

Jordan Love

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	Detroit	4:25
Sept. 11	Washington	8:15
Sept. 21	at Cleveland	1:00
Sept. 28	at Dallas	8:20
Oct. 5	BYE	
Oct. 12	Cincinnati	4:25
Oct. 19	at Arizona	4:25
Oct. 26	at Pittsburgh	8:20
Nov. 2	Carolina	1:00
Nov. 10	Philadelphia	8:15
Nov. 16	at N.Y. Giants	1:00
Nov. 23	Minnesota	1:00
Nov. 27	at Detroit	1:00
Dec. 7	Chicago	1:00
Dec. 14	at Denver	4:25
TBD	at Chicago	TBD
TBD	Baltimore	TBD
Jan. 4	at Minnesota	TBD

POWER RATING

83.0

T-9 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

43.65

NO. 10 TOUGHEST OF 32

The Packers have had just five losing seasons since 1992, and only one during Matt LeFluer's six-year tenure as head coach. Green Bay will be challenged to continue its run of success in 2025, for two reasons: Every team in the NFC North improved in the offseason, and the Packers did not.

In fact, there's a very real chance we've already seen the peak of the Jordan Love-led Packers

2025 WIN TOTAL: 9.5 (OV +105/UN -125)

Green Bay owns the league's 10th-toughest schedule, with nine games against 2024 playoff teams. That doesn't include their two dates against a Bears squad that is vastly improved (at least on paper), or a trio of successive matchups against the similarly talented Bengals, Cowboys and Cardinals. In other words, the Packers face 14 quality opponents in 2025.

The sheer volume of injuries that wreak havoc on the NFL each season give an inherent edge to the Under on any win-total bet. That, along with the difficult schedule and unimproved roster, has me projecting a 7-10 finish for Green Bay. While the preference is Under 9.5 (the team's traditional win total), I'm not opposed to the alt-line of Under 7.5 (+240). The Packers also have a tougher second-half schedule, creating potential opportunities for in-season win-total wagers on the Under at increased odds.

ODDS TO WIN NFC NORTH (+260)

To be clear, the Packers are not a bad team; they'd be definitive favorites in the NFC South and the AFC South. Unfortunately, they play in the NFL's deepest division. And despite having the second-shortest odds to win that division, each of Green Bay's rivals looks to be in better shape heading into the 2025 campaign. So we'll pass on the Cheeseheads winning the North for the first time since a three-year title run from 2019-21.

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL (+1000)

I'm down on the 2025 Packers, but they aren't drawing dead at making the postseason and going on a tear. They are, however, unbettable as the fifth choice to win the NFC at 10/1 odds. The better play: Wait for the postseason, and if Green Bay gets in, bet the moneyline prior to each of its playoff games and roll over the winnings to the next week.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET: PACKERS TO FINISH FOURTH IN NFC NORTH (+320)

The Packers still have a solid roster, but it suddenly looks like the weakest in the division. There's probably a better chance they slide into last place than win the NFC North — yet the odds on the slide are longer.

ERIC HARTLINE-IMAGN IMAGES

NFC NORTH

CHICAGO BEARS

BY RYAN REYNOLDS

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 5-12
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 8-7-2

Caleb Williams

After another offseason makeover, the Chicago Bears enter 2025 as one of the more fascinating teams in the NFL.

They have a new head coach in Ben Johnson, who has several new potential difference-makers on offense who were acquired via free agency, trades and the draft. All of them should help second-year quarterback Caleb Williams immediately.

The pieces are now in place for Williams to ascend. If he does, Chicago can become an instant threat in the NFC.

2025 WIN TOTAL:
8.5 (OV +130/UN -155)

The Bears were 3-7 in one-score games last season, including some of the most brutal losses in recent memory. They are a classic positive-regression candidate, with a significantly improved foundation and supporting cast on offense.

Even in an ultra-competitive division, I project a 10-7 record for the Bears, making for a solid Over bet at plus money — albeit with this caveat: It could take time for all the new pieces to gel on offense.

ODDS TO WIN NFC NORTH (+550)

The Bears have the sixth-toughest schedule in the league, but the second-softest within the NFC North. They have the raw materials to win the league's deepest division, and they took each of their rivals to the wire at least once last season. Chicago is a value option in this market.

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL (+2200)

It's probably too early in the Johnson-Williams marriage to make this bet, but a Super Bowl run is not off the table for Chicago. And at 22/1, it's worth at least a sprinkle.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET:
CALEB WILLIAMS TO THROW FOR 4000+ YARDS (+280)

Williams is a dynamic talent who secretly won the offseason without lifting a finger.

His interior offensive line was massively upgraded with three quality veterans. He'll go from suffering under inept play-caller Shane Waldron to gaining an exceptional one in Johnson. And this offseason, his employer signaled an intent to air it, spending the No. 10 and No. 39 draft picks on pass-catchers (despite having quality wide receiver and tight end options in-house).

As Johnson noted in mid-May, the Bears have never had a 4,000-yard passer in franchise history. "I think Caleb is going to be the first one," he said. "I see a chance for greatness here."

If a play-caller the caliber of Johnson believes in Williams' ability to rack up a bunch of passing yards, you should, too.

POWER RATING
81.0
T-16 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
44.62
NO. 6 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 8	Minnesota	8:15
Sept. 14	at Detroit	1:00
Sept. 21	Dallas	4:25
Sept. 28	at Las Vegas	4:25
Oct. 5	BYE	
Oct. 13	at Washington	8:15
Oct. 19	New Orleans	1:00
Oct. 26	at Baltimore	1:00
Nov. 2	at Cincinnati	1:00
Nov. 9	N.Y. Giants	1:00
Nov. 16	at Minnesota	1:00
Nov. 23	Pittsburgh	1:00
Nov. 28	at Philadelphia	3:00
Dec. 7	at Green Bay	1:00
Dec. 14	Cleveland	1:00
TBD	Green Bay	TBD
Dec. 28	at San Francisco	8:20
Jan. 4	Detroit	TBD

TALIA SPRAGUE-IMAGN IMAGES

MINNESOTA

VIKINGS

BY RYAN REYNOLDS

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 14-4
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 11-6-1

J.J. McCarthy

With Sam Darnold moving on to Seattle, Minnesota is making J.J. McCarthy the face of the franchise after the 2024 first-round pick missed his entire rookie season with a knee injury.

It's rare for a 14-3 team to let its quarterback depart in free agency, yet still improve the roster in the same offseason — but the Vikings did just that. They spent big on defense in free agency, then drafted two players who should help McCarthy in his first year as a starter.

2025 WIN TOTAL: 8.5 (OV -135/UN +115)

The Vikings are a prime regression candidate after going 8-1 in games decided by seven points or fewer in 2024. They also have the NFL's fourth-toughest schedule, with nine games against teams that made the postseason last year.

McCarthy flopping is the clearest path to failure for the Vikings. Then again, premium coaching on both sides of the ball and a loaded roster position Minnesota to mitigate those challenges.

With that, I see the Vikings going 10-7. Even if their good fortune in one-score games diminishes a bit, the floor — barring catastrophic injury luck — should be eight wins. That's why Minnesota Over 8.5 is among my favorite win total bets for 2025.

POWER RATING
82.5
NO. 12 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
45.08
NO. 4 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 8	at Chicago	8:15
Sept. 14	Atlanta	8:20
Sept. 21	Cincinnati	1:00
Sept. 28	Pittsburgh (Dublin)	9:30 a.m.
Oct. 5	Cleveland (London)	9:30 a.m.
Oct. 12	BYE	
Oct. 19	Philadelphia	1:00
Oct. 23	at L.A. Chargers	8:15
Nov. 2	at Detroit	1:00
Nov. 9	Baltimore	1:00
Nov. 16	Chicago	1:00
Nov. 23	at Green Bay	1:00
Nov. 30	at Seattle	4:05
Dec. 7	Washington	1:00
Dec. 14	at Dallas	8:20
Dec. 21	at N.Y. Giants	1:00
Dec. 25	Detroit	4:30
Jan. 4	Green Bay	TBD

ODDS TO WIN NFC NORTH (+290)

With four playoff-caliber teams that are each capable of finishing in first place, the NFC North projects to be the league's toughest division. When a division is *this* stacked, I only consider two wagering options: Back one of the two longest shots, or pass. (For the record, Minnesota is the consensus third choice.)

When contemplating any Vikings futures wager, be aware that their toughest schedule stretch is from Weeks 7-14. They also close the regular season with home games against the Lions and Packers.

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL (+1000)

Minnesota entered summer tied for the fifth favorite to win the NFC, per FanDuel. That alone makes this team an attractive option in this market. That said, if you're considering this wager, shop around to see if you can get closer to 20/1 odds.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET: J.J. McCARTHY TO WIN MVP (+7500)

This is much more of a bet on McCarthy's situation than it is on the player himself. After all, reigning NFL Coach of the Year Kevin O'Connell got a 35-touchdown campaign out of Darnold last season. In 2023, journeyman Nick Mullens played in three full games and threw for more than 300 yards in each.

McCarthy is a former first-round pick with a championship-caliber supporting cast, which warrants a small MVP bet at 75/1 odds.

BRAD REMPEL-USA TODAY SPORTS

NFC SOUTH

TAMPA BAY

BUCCANEERS

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 10-8
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 10-8

BY MICHAEL ARINZE

Baker Mayfield

The Tampa Bay Buccaneers finished with 10 victories in 2024; this year, they could be even stronger thanks to a productive offseason.

With the NFC South's other three teams still playing catch-up, Tampa Bay can lean into the team mantra of continuity as it goes for an unprecedented fifth consecutive NFC South title.

2025 WIN TOTAL: 9.5 (OV +100/UN -120)

In addition to locking up key players like wide receiver Chris Godwin and linebacker Lavonte David, the Bucs added veteran edge rusher Haason Reddick in free agency.

However, you could argue this team will benefit more from a successful draft, which includes WR Emeka Egbuka, CB Benjamin Morrison, CB Jacob Parrish, DE David Walker and DL Elijah Roberts. Pro Football Focus views each rookie as a potential starter or key rotational player.

Then there's quarterback Baker Mayfield, who is coming off the best season of his seven-year career, setting personal bests in completion rate (71.4%), yards (4,500) and touchdowns (41). Now he adds Egbuka to a list of wide receiver weapons that includes Godwin and Mike Evans.

The offense is good enough to go toe-to-toe with anyone, but it's the defense that could see the most significant gains. Reddick joins a Tampa Bay front four that finished seventh in sacks (49) in 2024. At the same time, Morrison and Parrish should improve a secondary that ranked 29th against the pass last year.

Toss in the league's 10th-easiest schedule, and you get a "buy" sign on the Bucs surpassing their win total.

ODDS TO WIN NFC SOUTH (+100)

The Bucs are easily the best team in the NFC South, and they're an absolute steal at even-money. Not only should they win a fifth straight division crown, they should do so by two games — minimum.

ODDS TO WIN SUPER BOWL (+2700)

That the Buccaneers are the 15th choice to win Super Bowl LX tells you where Mayfield is perceived in the hierarchy of top NFL quarterbacks. While Tampa Bay's odds are probably at the bottom range of where they should be, I'd need closer to 40/1 to consider a play here.

POWER RATING

82.0

T-13 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

41.74

NO. 23 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	at Atlanta	1:00
Sept. 15	at Houston	7:00
Sept. 21	N.Y. Jets	1:00
Sept. 28	Philadelphia	1:00
Oct. 5	at Seattle	4:05
Oct. 12	San Francisco	1:00
Oct. 20	at Detroit	7:00
Oct. 26	at New Orleans	4:05
Nov. 2	BYE	
Nov. 9	New England	1:00
Nov. 16	at Buffalo	1:00
Nov. 23	at L.A. Rams	8:20
Nov. 30	Arizona	1:00
Dec. 7	New Orleans	1:00
Dec. 11	Atlanta	8:15
Dec. 21	at Carolina	1:00
Dec. 28	at Miami	1:00
Jan. 4	Carolina	TBD

FAVORITE FUTURES BET

BAKER MAYFIELD OVER 3825.5 PASSING YARDS (-114)

Mayfield has accumulated more than 4,000 passing yards each of the past two seasons, and he's coming off a career-best completion rate at 71.4%. At 30 years old, his best years are arguably still ahead. Given the current firepower on offense, he should clear this yardage prop with room to spare.

KIM KLEMENT NEITZEL-IMAGN IMAGES

ATLANTA

FALCONS

NFC SOUTH

BY MICHAEL ARINZE

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 8-9
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 6-10-1

Bijan Robinson

The decision to demote Kirk Cousins in favor of 2024 first-round pick Michael Penix Jr. could significantly impact the Atlanta Falcons' chances of having a productive season — in a negative way.

It's easy to forget that Cousins led the Falcons to a 6-3 start in 2024 before the wheels completely fell off after Week 9. Overall, Cousins won seven games as Atlanta's quarterback, and it would be almost unfair to expect Penix to match (let alone exceed) that in his first season as a full-time starter.

2025 WIN TOTAL: 7.5 (OV -130/UN +110)

The Falcons were unable to offload Cousins before the start of the new league year. So his $30 million salary remains on the books. That's a pretty steep price for a backup. It's also a price that handcuffed Atlanta's ability to be active in the free agent market.

Leonard Floyd, Divine Deablo and Morgan Fox are the more noteworthy newcomers in Atlanta. However, the departures of defensive tackle Grady Jarrett and center Drew Dalman leave massive voids on the interior of both lines.

By most accounts, the Falcons had a solid draft (Pro Football Weekly gave them an A- grade). They fortified the defense by selecting pass rushers Jalon Walker and James Pearce Jr. in the first round, then added a couple of physical safeties in Xavier Watts and Billy Bowman Jr.

There's nothing wrong with having to rely on your draft class. Still, quarterback is the most critical position for any team — and I expect Penix to endure his share of growing pains. Take the Under at plus money.

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	Tampa Bay	1:00
Sept. 14	at Minnesota	8:20
Sept. 21	at Carolina	1:00
Sept. 28	Washington	1:00
Oct. 5	BYE	
Oct. 13	Buffalo	7:15
Oct. 19	at San Francisco	8:20
Oct. 26	Miami	1:00
Nov. 2	at New England	1:00
Nov. 9	Indianapolis (Berlin)	9:30 a.m.
Nov. 16	Carolina	1:00
Nov. 23	at New Orleans	4:25
Nov. 30	at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Dec. 7	Seattle	1:00
Dec. 11	at Tampa Bay	8:15
Dec. 21	at Arizona	4:05
Dec. 29	L.A. Rams	8:15
Jan. 4	New Orleans	TBD

POWER RATING
78.0
T-23 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
40.96
NO. 29 TOUGHEST OF 32

ODDS TO WIN NFC SOUTH (+230)

The Falcons would need just about everything to go right for them to overtake four-time division champ Tampa Bay. More likely, Atlanta is a year away from mounting a legitimate challenge for the NFC South crown.

ODDS TO WIN SUPER BOWL (+5500)

I have Atlanta as the ninth-best team in the NFC. Considering only seven squads earn playoff berths, simple math confirms that this is a bad bet. NFL oddsmakers confirm it, too: Atlanta is +148 underdog just to make the postseason.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET

BIJAN ROBINSON: OVER 1200.5 RUSHING YARDS (-114)

The best security blanket for a young quarterback is a solid running game. Enter Robinson, who racked up 1,456 rushing yards in 2024 and has averaged 4.6 and 4.8 yards per carry in his two seasons — all without missing a game.

Robinson should at least match his 304 carries from last season as the Falcons continue to ease Penix into the offense.

DALE ZANINE-IMAGN IMAGES

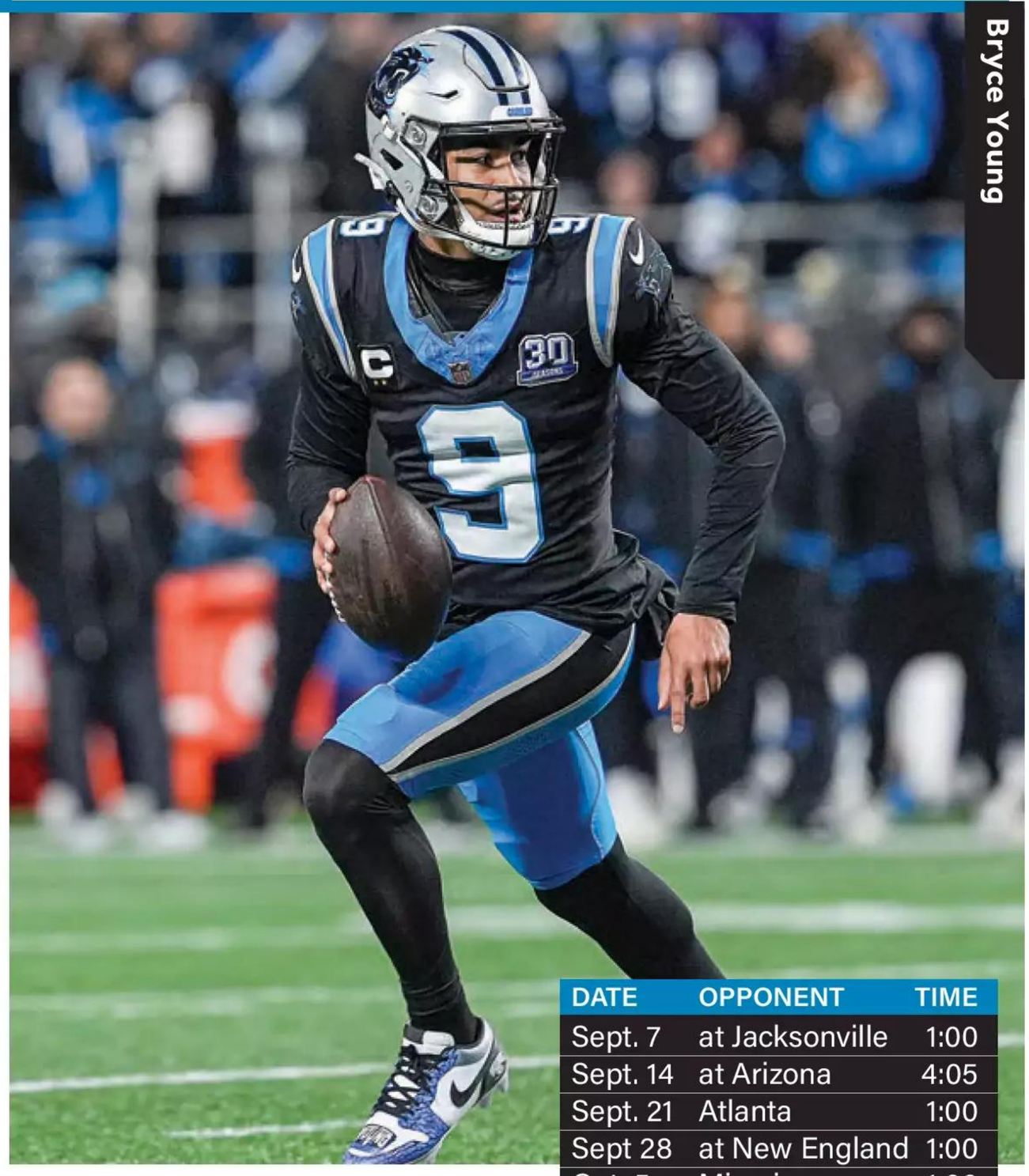
NFCSOUTH

CAROLINA PANTHERS

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 5-12
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 8-9

BY MICHAEL ARINZE



Bryce Young

The Carolina Panthers look poised to build on their strong finish to last season when they posted a 4-5 mark after a 1-7 start. And two of those late-season missteps were respectable losses to last year's Super Bowl participants: the Chiefs (30-27 home) and Eagles (22-16 road).

A big plus for the 2025 Panthers: They had one of the NFL's more impressive draft hauls. That's critical to the organization's overall vision as franchise quarterback Bryce Young heads into his make-or-break third season.

2025 WIN TOTAL: 6.5 (OV -140/UN +120)

Young responded nicely following his demotion two games into the 2024 season. When he took the job back from Andy Dalton in Week 5, he did a much better job protecting the ball. In fact, he was turnover-free in the final three games.

Carolina's offensive line also improved in pass protection, nearly halving the number of sacks allowed from 65 in 2023 to 36 in 2024. That's massive for Young, who has limited mobility. Also massive: the addition of 6-foot-5 wide receiver Tetairoa McMillan, an easy-to-find target for the diminutive Young.

Defensively, there's no place to go but up for the Panthers, who ranked dead last in both yards and points allowed in 2024.

Cornerback Jaycee Horn will get more help with safety Tre'Von Moehrig now patrolling the secondary, while tackles Tershawn Wharton, Bobby Brown III and edge rusher Patrick Jones II were key free-agent additions to the D-line. The Panthers also used their second- and third-round picks on edge rushers.

All in all, the future is finally looking bright in Carolina. So is the prospect of the Panthers posting at least seven victories for just the second time in seven years.

POWER RATING
76.5
NO. 27 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
41.15
NO. 27 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	at Jacksonville	1:00
Sept. 14	at Arizona	4:05
Sept. 21	Atlanta	1:00
Sept 28	at New England	1:00
Oct. 5	Miami	1:00
Oct. 12	Dallas	1:00
Oct. 19	at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Oct. 26	Buffalo	1:00
Nov. 2	at Green Bay	1:00
Nov. 9	New Orleans	1:00
Nov. 16	at Atlanta	1:00
Nov. 24	at San Francisco	8:15
Nov. 30	L.A. Rams	1:00
Dec. 7	BYE	
Dec. 14	at New Orleans	4:25
Dec. 21	Tampa Bay	1:00
TBD	Seattle	TBD
Jan. 4	at Tampa Bay	TBD

ODDS TO WIN NFC SOUTH (+450)

Yes, Carolina appears to be on the verge of taking the next step. That said, Young's sample size of solid play is limited. As a result, +380 isn't enough to take a shot with the Panthers winning their first division title since losing Super Bowl 50.

ODDS TO WIN SUPER BOWL (+120/1)

For the Panthers to win the Super Bowl, they'd first have to make the playoffs. Unfortunately, their best path to the postseason likely will be through the division. Since a division title is a longshot, Carolina's chances of winning its first Super Bowl are essentially moot.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET

BRYCE YOUNG OVER 18.5 TOUCHDOWN PASSES (-122)

Young had more passing touchdowns (15) in his second season than his rookie year (11) despite playing two fewer games. With better talent around him on offense, look for the 2021 Heisman Trophy winner to continue his development and surpass this number.

JIM DEDMON-IMAGN IMAGES

NFC SOUTH

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

BY MICHAEL ARINZE

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 5-12
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 7-10

Alvin Kamara

Four full seasons after Drew Brees retired, the New Orleans Saints are still searching for a franchise quarterback. Fans can only hope rookie Tyler Shough, the team's surprising second-round draft pick, will rise to the occasion and make the position his own.

However, Shough logged just one full season as a starter in college. So it's appropriate to wonder if his lack of experience will lead to a difficult year — for both him and the Saints.

2025 WIN TOTAL:
5.5 (OV +115/UN -135)

New Orleans was put in a pickle following the sudden retirement of QB Derek Carr, whose labrum tear in his right shoulder forced him to call it quits.

Spencer Rattler replaced Carr after the latter suffered his injury in late 2024, but the fifth-round rookie proved to be in way over his head. To wit: Rattler's 40.3 Total QBR would have put him 31st among 32 NFL quarterbacks had he qualified with enough pass attempts.

Given the uncertainty surrounding Carr's injury, the Saints chose to select Shough with the 40th overall pick. Despite appearing in just 42 games in seven college seasons with three schools (Oregon, Texas Tech and Louisville), Shough entered summer listed as QB1 on the depth chart.

Obviously, New Orleans is taking a considerable risk not having a veteran signal-caller on the roster (although that could change depending on how Schough performs in training camp and the preseason).

Regardless, considering how difficult it is to win in the NFL without a proven quarterback, I can't see the Saints recording more than five wins. Under is the play here.

ODDS TO WIN NFC SOUTH (+1100)

With only two quarterbacks selected in the first round, it's fair to surmise the 2025 NFL Draft lacked quality at the position. As a result, it's very difficult to envision New Orleans competing for the division crown with a starting quarterback who didn't even have a first-round grade.

ODDS TO WIN SUPER BOWL (400/1)

The biggest longshot to win Super Bowl LX among the NFL's 32 franchises? The New Orleans Saints. Enough said. Sure, 400/1 odds are tempting. You're still better off playing the Lotto.

POWER RATING
73.0
NO. 32 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
40.28
NO. 30 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	Arizona	1:00
Sept. 14	San Francisco	1:00
Sept. 21	at Seattle	4:05
Sept. 28	at Buffalo	1:00
Oct. 5	N.Y. Giants	1:00
Oct. 12	New England	4:25
Oct. 19	at Chicago	1:00
Oct. 26	Tampa Bay	4:05
Nov. 2	at L.A. Rams	4:05
Nov. 9	at Carolina	1:00
Nov. 16	BYE	
Nov. 23	Atlanta	4:25
Nov. 30	at Miami	1:00
Dec. 7	at Tampa Bay	1:00
Dec. 14	Carolina	4:25
Dec. 21	N.Y. Jets	1:00
Dec. 28	at Tennessee	1:00
Jan. 4	at Atlanta	TBD

FAVORITE FUTURES BET
SAINTS TO HAVE WORST REGULAR-SEASON RECORD (+600)

At 6/1, bet365 is offering tremendous value on the Saints to have the NFL's worst regular-season record. Shough had an injury-riddled college career, and without a veteran quarterback on the roster, things could spiral out of control in New Orleans real quick if he misses time — and even if he doesn't.

STEPHEN LEW-IMAGN IMAGES

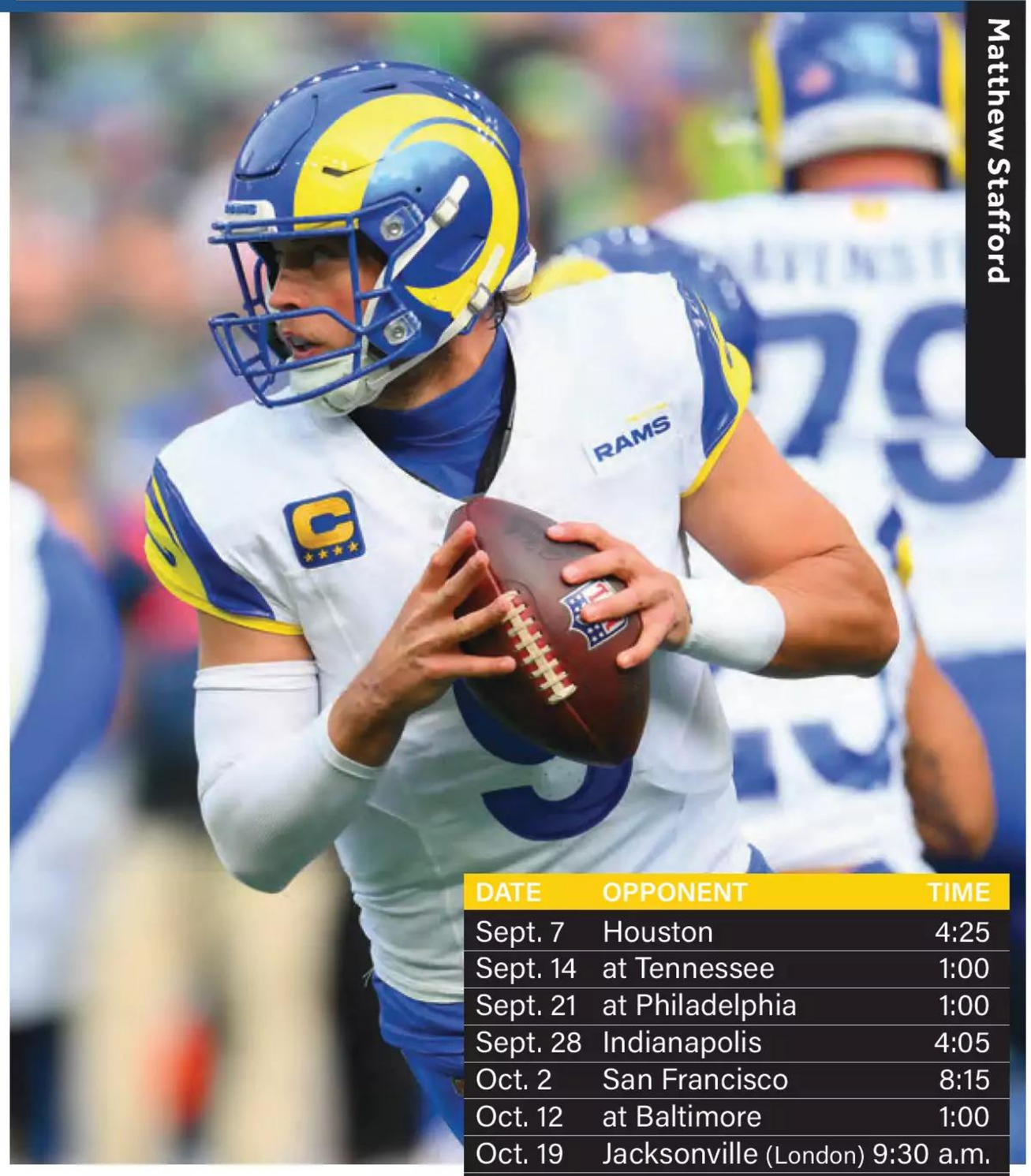
NFC WEST

LOS ANGELES RAMS

BY BOYCE GARRISON

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 11-8
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 11-8



Matthew Stafford

Sean McVay has averaged 10 wins per season since being named the Rams' head coach eight years ago. Only twice have his teams failed to make the playoffs, and only twice have his teams failed to reach double-digit victories.

One of those outlier seasons was in 2022, when L.A. went 5-12 after having to rely on quarterbacks Baker Mayfield, John Wolford and Bryce Perkins for seven starts while Matthew Stafford dealt with a concussion and spinal cord contusion.

As usual, the Rams will only go as far as Stafford can carry them, so his health is paramount — and he turns 38 the day before Super Bowl LX. Stafford no longer will throw to longtime security blanket Cooper Kupp (Seahawks), but the sting of that loss was lessened by the signing of veteran Davante Adams.

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	Houston	4:25
Sept. 14	at Tennessee	1:00
Sept. 21	at Philadelphia	1:00
Sept. 28	Indianapolis	4:05
Oct. 2	San Francisco	8:15
Oct. 12	at Baltimore	1:00
Oct. 19	Jacksonville (London)	9:30 a.m.
Oct. 26	BYE	
Nov. 2	New Orleans	4:05
Nov. 9	at San Francisco	4:25
Nov. 16	Seattle	4:05
Nov. 23	Tampa Bay	8:20
Nov. 30	at Carolina	1:00
Dec. 7	at Arizona	4:25
Dec. 14	Detroit	4:25
Dec. 18	at Seattle	8:15
Dec. 29	at Atlanta	8:15
Jan. 4	Arizona	TBD

POWER RATING
83.5
T-6 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
42.87
NO. 15 TOUGHEST OF 32

2025 WIN TOTAL: 9.5 (OV -135/UN +115)

Handicapping this one is easy: If you believe Stafford will stay upright, bet the Over. If you think Father Time is tapping him on his shoulder pads, the Under is the play.

Our recommendation? Bank on Los Angeles exceeding expectations in 2025.

Stafford knows how to avoid trouble; Adams is an upgrade over the oft-injured Kupp; and rookie tight end Terrance Ferguson gives McVay another toy to deploy. Plus, the Rams re-signed veteran QB Jimmy Garoppolo, who should be able to keep the ship steady if Stafford misses time.

ODDS TO WIN NFC WEST (+190)

The Rams and 49ers entered spring as co-favorites in the NFC West, per FanDuel. However, as summer hit, San Francisco emerged as the team to beat, with division title odds of +150.

It's important to note, though, that the 49ers were forced to part ways with a few key cogs in order to pay QB Brock Purdy, which could leave them thin at multiple positions. That makes the Rams a solid bet to win a second straight division crown at a price approaching 2/1.

ODDS TO WIN SUPER BOWL (+1900)

The Rams have the sixth-shortest odds to win Super Bowl LX. The value isn't there, however, considering Los Angeles would potentially have to get past the Eagles, Lions and/or Commanders in the NFC before encountering an AFC juggernaut in the Super Bowl. Unless you're a diehard Rams fan, invest your money elsewhere — like the suggested wager below.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET: MATTHEW STAFFORD UNDER 3750.5 PASSING YARDS (-114)

At the height of his tenure in Detroit, Stafford topped 4,000 passing yards in seven straight seasons. However, he's only surpassed 3,750 yards twice in the last six. The veteran quarterback missed 11 games over the last three seasons — and he'll definitely sit at least once this year if L.A. has a playoff position secured.

STEVEN BISIG-IMAGN IMAGES

SAN FRANCISCO

49ERS

BY BOYCE GARRISON

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 6-11
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 5-12

Christian McCaffrey

San Francisco 49ers general manager John Lynch had a busy offseason, from prioritzing free agents to executing the draft to working out lucrative contract extensions with quarterback Brock Purdy and standout linebacker Fred Warner.

The latter moves made headlines, as Purdy now ranks among the top 10 highest-paid quarterbacks and Warner is the league's highest-paid linebacker. Those decisions meant some prominent players had to go, which might leave San Francisco vulnerable — in 2025 and beyond.

2025 WIN TOTAL: 10.5 (OV -110/UN -110)

The most notable of 49ers to depart during the offseason was receiver Deebo Samuel, who was traded to the Washington Commanders.

Also, linebacker Dre Greenlaw and safety Talanoa Hufanga signed with Denver, while cornerback Charvarius Ward moved on to Indianapolis and three-year starting guard Aaron Banks bolted for Green Bay.

In other words, San Francisco's depth — and faith in Purdy — will be tested.

After seasons of 10-7, 13-4 and 12-5, which included two NFC conference championship losses and one Super Bowl defeat, the 49ers won just six games in 2024 as injuries took a hard bite. Will San Francisco rebound? Most assuredly. Will the team rebound five games worth? The big stat: The 49ers will play the league's easiest schedule, based on their opponents' projected win totals.

Thus, the Over is a strong play, despite that perceived lack of depth and only eight home games.

POWER RATING

83.5

T-6 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

38.79

32 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	at Seattle	4:05
Sept. 14	at New Orleans	1:00
Sept. 21	Arizona	4:25
Sept. 28	Jacksonville	4:05
Oct. 2	at L.A. Rams	8:15
Oct. 12	at Tampa Bay	1:00
Oct. 19	Atlanta	8:20
Oct. 26	at Houston	1:00
Nov. 2	at N.Y. Giants	1:00
Nov. 9	L.A. Rams	4:25
Nov. 16	at Arizona	4:05
Nov. 24	Carolina	8:15
Nov. 30	at Cleveland	1:00
Dec. 7	BYE	
Dec. 14	Tennessee	4:25
Dec. 22	at Indianapolis	8:15
Dec. 28	Chicago	8:20
Jan. 4	Seattle	TBD

ODDS TO WIN NFC WEST (+150)

This number tumbled from +175 to +150 in late spring, but it's still worth a gamble. Injuries like last year's are unlikely to hit two years in a row. The division should come down to the 49ers and Rams, with the 49ers getting our money.

ODDS TO WIN SUPER BOWL (+2100)

The 49ers are tied for the eighth choice to win their first title in 31 years, which means there's a chance. Kyle Shanahan's teams have lost two Super Bowls and two conference championship games in the last six years. He's too good of a coach to not get over the hump and win the franchise's sixth Super Bowl. This wager is worth a small fraction of your bankroll, especially at this price ... unless you think Purdy will struggle living up to the weight of the large contract.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET: CHRISTIAN McCAFFREY OVER 950.5 RUSHING YARDS (-114)

The talented running back was limited to four games last season with two separate injuries. He is said to be fully healthy entering camp, and a healthy McCaffrey is still a dangerous weapon. It's a roll of the dice considering his injury past, but if he can stay on the field for a dozen games or so, he should blow past this number, even with last season's emergence of Isaac Guerendo.

KIM KLEMENT NEITZEL-IMAGN IMAGES

NFC WEST

SEATTLE SEAHAWKS

BY BOYCE GARRISON

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 10-6
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 6-10-1

Jaxon Smith-Njigba

From Geno Smith to Sam Darnold.

From a quarterback with one playoff appearance (that ended in a blowout loss) to a quarterback with one playoff appearance (that ended in a blowout loss). That was the biggest headline in Seattle during the offseason.

Darnold thrived during the 2024 regular season with Minnesota, going 14-3 as the starter under what many consider an offensive genius and quarterback whisperer, Vikings head coach Kevin O'Connell. That followed a 21-35 record in his time with the Jets, the team that drafted him, the Panthers, and 49ers (just one start).

Don't expect the Darnold of the Jets/Panthers, but likewise don't expect the one who took Minnesota to the playoffs in 2024.

2025 WIN TOTAL: 7.5 (OV -135/UN +110)

This tells you all you need to know about the current state of the Seahawks: Last season, they went 10-7, tying the division-winning Rams. Now oddsmakers believe there is a better chance than not that Seattle will finish below .500 in 2025.

The franchise's Pythagorean win total is 8.0. However, the Seahawks play nine of 17 games away from home; they have a new quarterback playing in a new system; and that new QB won't be throwinf to DK Metcalf (traded to Pittsburgh). Take the under.

ODDS TO WIN NFC WEST (+550)

Even if Darnold has another solid season, and a strong rookie class exceeds expectations, it wouldn't be shocking to see Seattle finish in the basement of a tough division. For that reason, we can't recommend betting on the Seahawks, even at better than 5/1 odds.

ODDS TO WIN SUPER BOWL (+6500)

Only nine teams have longer Super Bowl odds than Seattle. Put another way, the Seahawks are -225 to miss the playoffs for a third straight season. Even if you're a diehard fan who considers yourself the real 12th Man, don't make this bet.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET:

JAXON SMITH-NJIGBA OVER 1000 RECEIVING YARDS (+105)

After a disappointing rookie campaign, Smith-Njigba went off in 2024, snagging 100 of 137 targets for 1,130 yards. Of course, the third-year pro benefitted from the presence of No. 1 wideout DK Metcalf, who is now with the Steelers. Metcalf's replacement is no slouch, though: Cooper Kupp is a savvy veteran who commands attention — especially near the line of scrimmage. That should free up Smith-Njigba to run some longer routes, making it easy for the former Ohio State star to post a second straight 1,000-yard receiving season if he stays healthy.

POWER RATING

80.5

T-18 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

41.88

NO. 22 TOUGHEST OF 32

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	San Francisco	4:05
Sept. 14	at Pittsburgh	1:00
Sept. 21	New Orleans	4:05
Sept. 25	at Arizona	8:15
Oct. 5	Tampa Bay	4:05
Oct. 12	at Jacksonville	1:00
Oct. 20	Houston	10:00
Oct. 26	BYE	
Nov. 2	at Washington	8:20
Nov. 9	Arizona	4:05
Nov. 16	at L.A. Rams	4:05
Nov. 23	at Tennessee	1:00
Nov. 30	Minnesota	4:05
Dec. 7	at Atlanta	1:00
Dec. 14	Indianapolis	4:25
Dec. 18	L.A. Rams	8:15
TBD	at Carolina	TBD
Jan. 4	at San Fran.	TBD

EAMON HORWEDEL-IMAGN IMAGES

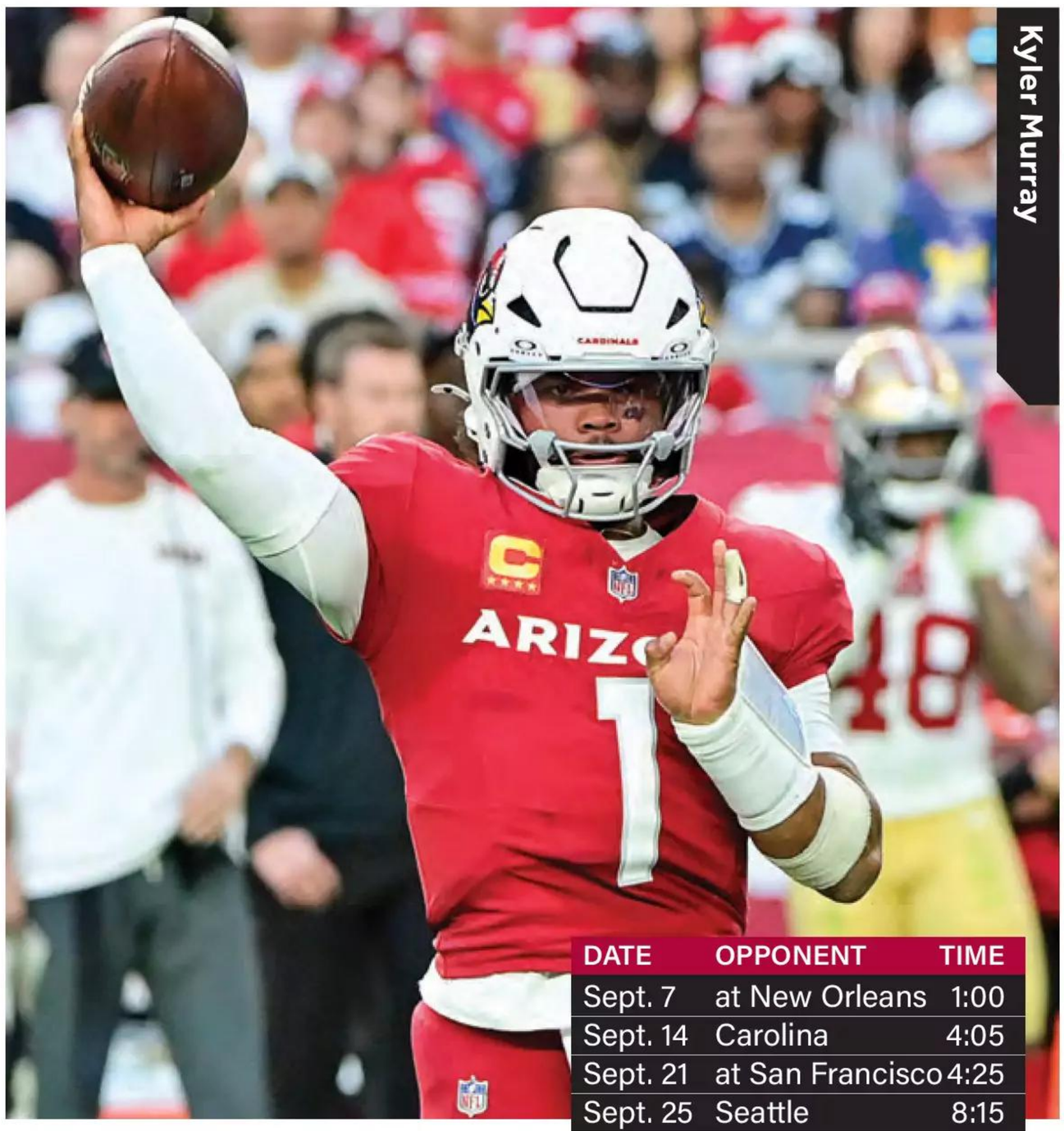
ARIZONA

CARDINALS

BY BOYCE GARRISON

2024 BETTING RECORD

STRAIGHT UP: 8-9
AGAINST THE SPREAD: 11-6



Kyler Murray

The Arizona Cardinals improved four games in Johnathan Gannon's second season as head coach, going from 4-13 to 8-9. That's nothing to dismiss for a franchise that hasn't had much stability since Bruce Arians departed after the 2017 season.

The question now is: Can Arizona build on that improvement? No one controls a bigger part of the answer than Kyler Murray, who owns a 36-45-1 career record as a starter and has had trouble staying healthy.

The Cardinals spent much of their 2025 draft capital on defense and did the same in free agency. That means the front office has faith in Murray and the core surrounding the dual-threat quarterback — for at least one more season, anyway.

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sept. 7	at New Orleans	1:00
Sept. 14	Carolina	4:05
Sept. 21	at San Francisco	4:25
Sept. 25	Seattle	8:15
Oct. 5	Tennessee	4:05
Oct. 12	at Indianapolis	1:00
Oct. 19	Green Bay	4:25
Oct. 26	BYE	
Nov. 3	at Dallas	8:15
Nov. 9	at Seattle	4:05
Nov. 16	San Francisco	4:05
Nov. 23	Jacksonville	4:05
Nov. 30	at Tampa Bay	1:00
Dec. 7	L.A. Rams	4:25
Dec. 14	at Houston	1:00
Dec. 21	Atlanta	4:05
TBD	at Cincinnati	TBD
Jan. 4	at L.A. Rams	TBD

POWER RATING
79.5
NO. 21 OF 32

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE
42.06
NO. 21 TOUGHEST OF 32

2025 WIN TOTAL: 8.5 (OV +100/UN -120)

This mostly rides on Murray, who's coming off a season in which he started all 17 games after missing a total of 15 the previous two years. When healthy, the 2018 Heisman Trophy winner has shown he can be effective. Toss in an improved defense, and Arizona should be good enough to secure at least one more victory than last year.

If you don't believe Murray will remain healthy and/or effective, bet the Under now. After a favorable first six weeks, the Cardinals' schedule gets significantly more difficult.

ODDS TO WIN NFC WEST (+440)

With oddsmakers favoring the 49ers (+150) and Rams (+190) in the NFC West, there's not much room for the Cardinals, who own the division's third-longest odds. Could they sneak past both? Sure, if everything breaks right and Murray stays upright. That's a lot to ask.

ODDS TO MAKE SUPER BOWL (+4400)

The last time a team came out of nowhere — like the Cardinals would have to do — to win the Super Bowl? The 2017 Eagles, who opened as a 40/1 longshot. That, however, is the only time in the last dozen years that a Super Bowl winner had a preseason title price longer than 12/1. True, Arizona's odds to win Super Bowl LX have dropped a bit, suggesting some in the market have faith. You shouldn't.

FAVORITE FUTURES BET:
KYLER MURRAY: OVER 3375.5 PASSING YARDS (-114)

Murray has surpassed 3,700 yards in four of his six professional seasons. The two exceptions were his injury-marred 2022 and 2023 campaigns. The 2019 No. 1 overall pick has yet to live up to the $230 million contract he signed in 2022, but his coach believes a breakout season is coming.

"I think he's gonna blow it out of the water this year and have his best year as a pro," Gannon said of Murray in late May.

We echo that optimism — while hoping Murray suits up for at least 14 games.

MATT KARTOZIAN-IMAGN IMAGES

NFC SCHEDULES

EAST

DALLAS COWBOYS

Week 1: Sept. 4 at Philadelphia
Week 2: Sept. 14 vs. N.Y. Giants
Week 3: Sept. 21 at Chicago
Week 4: Sept. 28 vs. Green Bay
Week 5: Oct. 5 at N.Y. Jets
Week 6: Oct. 12 at Carolina
Week 7: Oct. 19 vs. Washington
Week 8: Oct. 26 at Denver
Week 9: Nov. 3 vs. Arizona
Week 10: BYE
Week 11: Nov. 17 at Las Vegas
Week 12: Nov. 23 vs. Philadelphia
Week 13: Nov. 27 vs. Kansas City
Week 14: Dec. 4 at Detroit
Week 15: Dec. 14 vs. Minnesota
Week 16: Dec. 21 vs. L.A. Chargers
Week 17: Dec. 25 at Washington
Week 18: Jan. 4 at N.Y. Giants

NEW YORK GIANTS

Week 1: Sept. 7 at Washington
Week 2: Sept. 14 at Dallas
Week 3: Sept. 21 vs. Kansas City
Week 4: Sept. 28 vs. L.A. Chargers
Week 5: Oct. 5 at New Orleans
Week 6: Oct. 9 vs. Philadelphia
Week 7: Oct. 19 at Denver
Week 8: Oct. 26 at Philadelphia
Week 9: Nov. 2 vs. San Francisco
Week 10: Nov. 9 at Chicago
Week 11: Nov. 16 vs. Green Bay
Week 12: Nov. 23 at Detroit
Week 13: Dec. 1 at New England
Week 14: BYE
Week 15: Dec. 14 vs. Washington
Week 16: Dec. 21 vs. Minnesota
Week 17: Dec. 28 at Las Vegas
Week 18: Jan. 4 vs. Dallas

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES

Week 1: Sept. 4 vs. Dallas
Week 2: Sept. 14 at Kansas City
Week 3: Sept. 21 vs. L.A. Rams
Week 4: Sept. 24 at Tampa Bay
Week 5: Oct. 5 vs. Denver
Week 6: Oct. 9 at N.Y. Giants
Week 7: Oct. 19 at Minnesota
Week 8: Oct. 26 vs. N.Y. Giants
Week 9: BYE
Week 10: Nov. 10 at Green Bay
Week 11: Nov. 16 vs. Detroit
Week 12: Nov. 23 at Dallas
Week 13: Nov. 28 vs. Chicago
Week 14: Dec. 8 at L.A. Chargers
Week 15: vs. Las Vegas
Week 16: Dec. 20 at Washington
Week 17: Dec. 28 at Buffalo
Week 18: Jan. 4 vs. Washington

WASHINGTON COMMANDERS

Week 1: Sept. 7 vs. N.Y. Giants
Week 2: Sept. 11 at Green Bay
Week 3: Sept. 21 vs. Las Vegas
Week 4: Sept. 28 at Atlanta
Week 5: Oct. 5 at L.A. Chargers
Week 6: Oct. 13 vs. Chicago
Week 7: Oct. 19 at Dallas
Week 8: Oct. 27 at Kansas City
Week 9: Nov. 2 vs. Seattle
Week 10: Nov. 9 vs. Detroit
Week 11: Nov. 16 at Miami (Madrid)
Week 12: BYE
Week 13: Nov. 30 vs. Denver
Week 14: Dec. 7 at Minnesota
Week 15: Dec. 14 at N.Y. Giants
Week 16: Dec. 20 vs. Philadelphia
Week 17: Dec. 25 vs. Dallas
Week 18: Jan. 4 at Philadelphia

WEST

ARIZONA CARDINALS

Week 1: Sept. 7 at New Orleans
Week 2: Sept. 14 vs. Carolina
Week 3: Sept. 21 at San Francisco
Week 4: Sept. 28 vs. Seattle
Week 5: Oct. 5 vs. Tennessee
Week 6: Oct. 12 at Indianapolis
Week 7: Oct. 19 vs. Green Bay
Week 8: BYE
Week 9: Nov. 3 at Dallas
Week 10: Nov. 9 at Seattle
Week 11: Nov. 16 vs. San Francisco
Week 12: Nov. 23 vs. Jacksonville
Week 13: Nov. 30 at Tampa Bay
Week 14: Dec. 7 vs. L.A. Rams
Week 15: Dec. 14 at Houston
Week 16: Dec. 21 vs. Atlanta
Week 17: Dec. 27 or 28 at Cincinnati
Week 18: Jan. 4 at L.A. Rams

LOS ANGELESRAMS

Week 1: Sept. 7 vs. Houston
Week 2: Sept. 14 at Tennessee
Week 3: Sept. 21 at Philadelphia
Week 4: Sept. 28 vs. Indianapolis
Week 5: Oct. 2 vs. San Francisco
Week 6: Oct. 12 at Baltimore
Week 7: Oct. 19 at Jacksonville (London)
Week 8: BYE
Week 9: Nov. 2 vs. New Orleans
Week 10: Nov. 9 at San Francisco
Week 11: Nov. 16 vs. Seattle
Week 12: Nov. 23 vs. Tampa Bay
Week 13: Nov. 30 at Carolina
Week 14: Dec. 7 at Arizona
Week 15: Dec. 14 vs. Detroit
Week 16: Dec. 18 at Seattle
Week 17: Dec. 29 at Atlanta
Week 18: Jan. 4 vs. Arizona

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

Week 1: Sept. 7 at Seattle
Week 2: Sept. 14 at New Orleans
Week 3: Sept. 21 vs. Arizona
Week 4: Sept. 28 vs. Jacksonville
Week 5: Oct. 2 at L.A. Rams
Week 6: Oct. 12 at Tampa Bay
Week 7: Oct. 19 vs. Atlanta
Week 8: Oct. 26 at Houston
Week 9: Nov. 2 at N.Y. Giants
Week 10: Nov. 9 vs. L.A. Rams
Week 11: Nov. 16 at Arizona
Week 12: Nov. 24 vs. Carolina
Week 13: Nov. 30 at Cleveland
Week 14: BYE
Week 15: Dec. 14 vs. Tennessee
Week 16: Dec. 22 at Indianapolis
Week 17: Dec. 28 vs. Chicago
Week 18: Jan. 4 vs. Seattle

SEATTLE SEAHAWKS

Week 1: Sept. 7 vs. San Francisco
Week 2: Sept. 14 at Pittsburgh
Week 3: Sept. 21 vs. New Orleans
Week 4: Sept. 25 at Arizona
Week 5: Oct. 5 vs. Tampa Bay
Week 6: Oct. 12 at Jacksonville
Week 7: Oct. 20 vs. Houston
Week 8: BYE
Week 9: Nov. 2 at Washington
Week 10: Nov. 9 vs. Arizona
Week 11: Nov. 16 at L.A. Rams
Week 12: Nov. 23 at Tennessee
Week 13: Nov. 30 vs. Minnesota
Week 14: Dec. 7 at Atlanta
Week 15: Dec. 14 vs. Indianapolis
Week 16: Dec. 18 vs. L.A. Rams
Week 17: Dec. 27 or 28 at Carolina
Week 18: Jan. 4 at San Francisco

NORTH

CHICAGO BEARS

Week 1: Sept. 8 vs. Minnesota
Week 2: Sept. 14 at Detroit
Week 3: Sept. 21 vs. Dallas
Week 4: Sept. 28 at Las Vegas
Week 5: BYE
Week 6: Oct. 13 at Washington
Week 7: Oct. 19 vs. New Orleans
Week 8: Oct. 26 at Baltimore
Week 9: Nov. 2 at Cincinnati
Week 10: Nov. 9 vs. N.Y. Giants
Week 11: Nov. 16 at Minnesota
Week 12: Nov. 23 vs. Pittsburgh
Week 13: Nov. 28 at Philadelphia
Week 14: Dec. 7 at Green Bay
Week 15: Dec. 14 vs. Cleveland
Week 16: Dec. 20 vs. Green Bay
Week 17: Dec. 28 at San Francisco
Week 18: Jan. 4 vs. Detroit

DETROIT LIONS

Week 1: Sept. 7 at Green Bay
Week 2: Sept. 14 vs. Chicago
Week 3: Sept. 22 at Baltimore
Week 4: Sept. 28 vs. Cleveland
Week 5: Oct. 5 at Cincinnati
Week 6: Oct. 12 at Kansas City
Week 7: Oct. 20 vs. Tampa Bay
Week 8: BYE
Week 9: Nov. 2 vs. Minnesota
Week 10: Nov. 9 at Washington
Week 11: Nov. 16 at Philadelphia
Week 12: Nov. 23 vs. N.Y. Giants
Week 13: Nov. 27 vs. Green Bay
Week 14: Dec. 4 vs. Dallas
Week 15: Dec. 14 at L.A. Rams
Week 16: Dec. 21 vs. Pittsburgh
Week 17: Dec. 25 at Minnesota
Week 18: Jan. 4 at Chicago

GREEN BAY PACKERS

Week 1: Sept. 7 vs. Detroit
Week 2: Sept. 11 vs. Washington
Week 3: Sept. 21 at Cleveland
Week 4: Sept. 28 at Dallas
Week 5: BYE
Week 6: Oct. 12 vs. Cincinnati
Week 7: Oct. 19 at Arizona
Week 8: Oct. 26 at Pittsburgh
Week 9: Nov. 2 vs. Carolina
Week 10: Nov. 10 vs. Philadelphia
Week 11: Nov. 16 at N.Y. Giants
Week 12: Nov. 23 vs. Minnesota
Week 13: Nov. 27 at Detroit
Week 14: Dec. 7 vs. Chicago
Week 15: Dec. 14 at Denver
Week 16: Dec. 20 at Chicago
Week 17: Dec. 27 or 28 vs. Baltimore
Week 18: Jan. 4 at Minnesota

MINNESOTA VIKINGS

Week 1: Sept. 8 at Chicago
Week 2: Sept. 14 vs. Atlanta
Week 3: Sept. 21 vs. Cincinnati
Week 4: Sept. 28 at Pittsburgh (Dublin)
Week 5: Oct. 5 at Cleveland (London)
Week 6: BYE
Week 7: Oct. 19 vs. Philadelphia
Week 8: Oct. 23 at L.A. Chargers
Week 9: Nov. 2 at Detroit
Week 10: Nov. 9 vs. Baltimore
Week 11: Nov. 16 vs. Chicago
Week 12: Nov. 23 at Green Bay
Week 13: Nov. 30 at Seattle
Week 14: Dec. 7 vs. Washington
Week 15: Dec. 14 at Dallas
Week 16: Dec. 21 at N.Y. Giants
Week 17: Dec. 25 vs. Detroit
Week 18: Jan. 4 vs. Green Bay

SOUTH

ATLANTA FALCONS

Week 1: Sept. 7 vs. Tampa Bay
Week 2: Sept. 14 at Minnesota
Week 3: Sept. 21 at Carolina
Week 4: Sept. 28 vs. Washington
Week 5: BYE
Week 6: Oct. 13 vs. Buffalo
Week 7: Oct. 19 at San Francisco
Week 8: Oct. 26 vs. Miami
Week 9: Nov. 2 at New England
Week 10: Nov. 9 vs. Indianapolis (Berlin)
Week 11: Nov. 16 vs. Carolina
Week 12: Nov. 23 at New Orleans
Week 13: Nov. 30 at N.Y. Jets
Week 14: Dec. 7 vs. Seattle
Week 15: Dec. 11 at Tampa Bay
Week 16: Dec. 21 at Arizona
Week 17: Dec. 29 vs. L.A. Rams
Week 18: Jan. 4 vs. New Orleans

CAROLINA PANTHERS

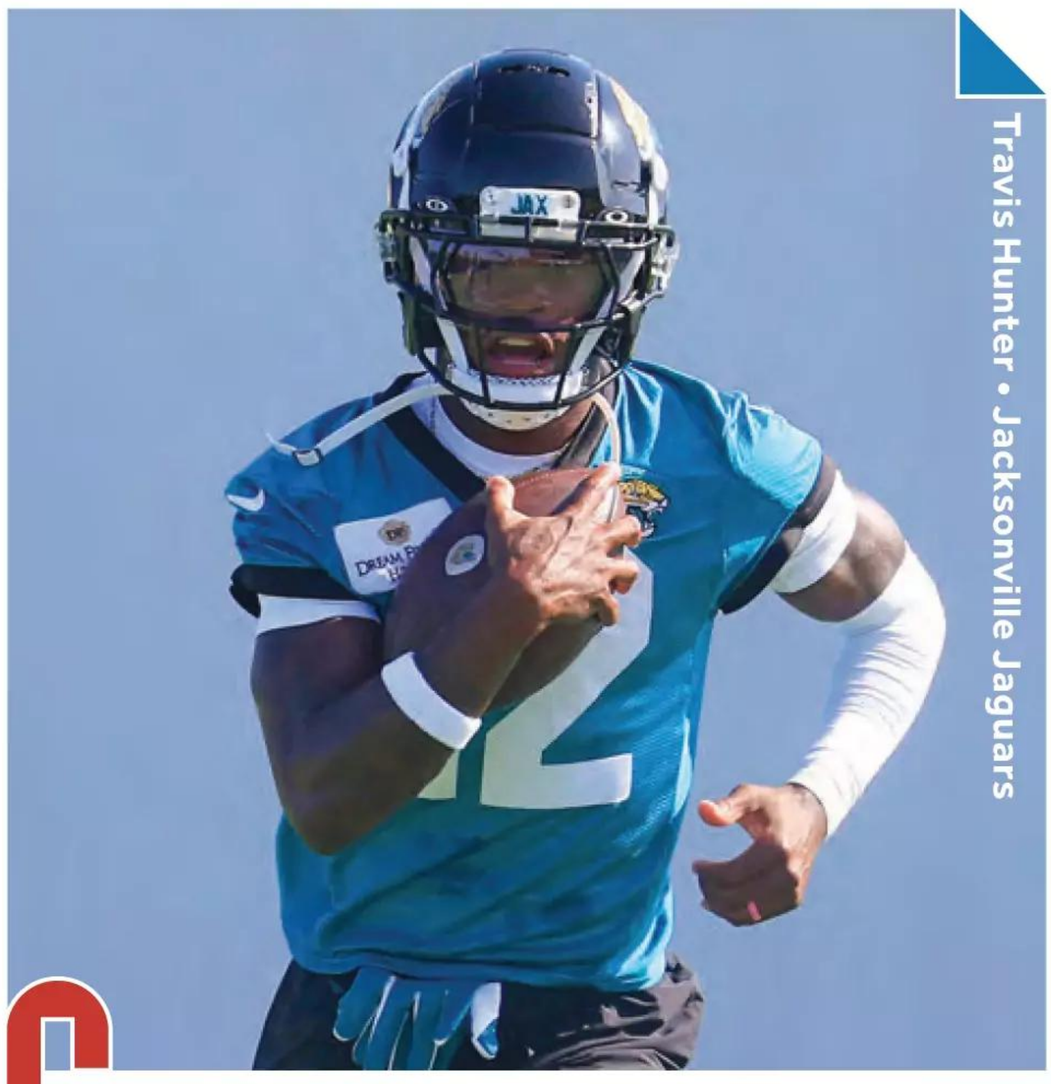
Week 1: Sept. 7 at Jacksonville
Week 2: Sept. 14 at Arizona
Week 3: Sept. 21 vs. Atlanta
Week 4: Sept. 28 at New England
Week 5: Oct. 5 vs. Miami
Week 6: Oct. 12 vs. Dallas
Week 7: Oct. 19 at N.Y. Jets
Week 8: Oct. 26 vs. Buffalo
Week 9: Nov. 2 at Green Bay
Week 10: Nov. 9 vs. New Orleans
Week 11: Nov. 16 at Atlanta
Week 12: Nov. 24 at San Francisco
Week 13: Nov. 30 vs. L.A. Rams
Week 14: BYE
Week 15: Dec. 14 at New Orleans
Week 16: Dec. 21 vs. Tampa Bay
Week 17: Dec. 27 or 28 vs. Seattle
Week 18: Jan. 4 at Tampa Bay

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

Week 1: Sept. 7 vs. Arizona
Week 2: Sept. 14 vs. San Francisco
Week 3: Sept. 21 at Seattle
Week 4: Sept. 28 at Buffalo
Week 5: Oct. 5 vs. N.Y. Giants
Week 6: Oct. 12 vs. New England
Week 7: Oct. 19 at Chicago
Week 8: Oct. 26 vs. Tampa Bay
Week 9: Nov. 2 at L.A. Rams
Week 10: Nov. 9 at Carolina
Week 11: BYE
Week 12: Nov. 23 vs. Atlanta
Week 13: Nov. 30 at Miami
Week 14: Dec. 7 at Tampa Bay
Week 15: Dec. 14 vs. Carolina
Week 16: Dec. 21 vs. N.Y. Jets
Week 17: Dec. 28 at Tennessee
Week 18: Jan. 4 at Atlanta

TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS

Week 1: Sept. 7 at Atlanta
Week 2: Sept. 15 at Houston
Week 3: Sept. 21 vs. N.Y. Jets
Week 4: Sept. 28 vs. Philadelphia
Week 5: Oct. 5 at Seattle
Week 6: Oct. 12 vs. San Francisco
Week 7: Oct. 20 at Detroit
Week 8: Oct. 26 at New Orleans
Week 9: BYE
Week 10: Nov. 9 vs. New England
Week 11: Nov. 16 at Buffalo
Week 12: Nov. 23 at L.A. Rams
Week 13: Nov. 30 vs. Arizona
Week 14: Dec. 7 vs. New Orleans
Week 15: Dec. 11 vs. Atlanta
Week 16: Dec. 21 at Carolina
Week 17: Dec. 28 vs. Miami
Week 18: Jan. 4 vs. Carolina



Travis Hunter • Jacksonville Jaguars

NFL Survivor Pool Primer

BY MICHAEL LEBOFF

CeeDee Lamb • Dallas Cowboys

Survivor pools are supposed to be simple: Pick a team each week. If they win, you move on; if they lose, you're out.

That kind of simplicity stands out in the modern era of fantasy and sports betting. But giving yourself the best chance to win a survivor pool, especially one that features a multitude of participants, requires a game plan. It also requires doing homework — especially since most survivor pools limit you to using a team just once all season.

That's why the "pick the biggest favorite each week" approach is terrible.

Sure, maybe you get through the first few weeks of the season unscathed. But by the time you get to Week 6 or 7, you likely will have blown through the best teams, leaving you to navigate the next 11 weeks with a bunch of average squads (or worse).

Remember: You're not just trying to survive each week. You're trying to win the whole thing. That means you're playing against the entire field of contestants.

The best path to success, especially in large pools? Avoid trendy teams early on — and hope they lose and take out a large portion of the field with them.

That's exactly what happened last year, when the Cincinnati Bengals were huge home favorites in Week 1 against New England. Result: Patriots 16, Bengals 10.

Now let's apply the logic to Week 1 of the 2025 season.

As of mid-June, three teams were home favorites of at least 7 points: Eagles (vs. Cowboys), Commanders (vs. Giants) and Broncos (vs. Titans).

Barring major injuries, Philadelphia, Washington and Denver will be among the most popular Week 1 survivor picks. That trio may even represent 50% (or more) of the total selections.

Rather than getting overly chalky in Week 1, though, consider backing a more modest favorite – like the Jaguars (-2.5) against the Panthers. It's a bigger risk (on paper) than rolling with, say, the Eagles. But in the big picture, you give yourself positive value.

Are the Jags more likely to lose in Week 1 than Philadelphia, Washington and Denver? Yes. But if Jacksonville prevails — and one or more of the trendy favorites don't — you're now competing against far fewer contestants. Worst-case scenario, you've saved the Commanders, Broncos and Eagles for later in the season.

It's still quite early to lock in the ideal path for survivor pool success in 2025. But if you examine the first month of the schedule, you can map out a soft plan that leaves all the heavyweights in your back pocket:

- **WEEK 1: JAGUARS (-2.5) vs. PANTHERS**
- **WEEK 2: COWBOYS (-4.5) vs. GIANTS**
- **WEEK 3: SEAHAWKS (-6.5) vs. SAINTS**
- **WEEK 4: DOLPHINS (-5.5) vs. JETS**

If that path works, you won't be the only one in your survivor pool still alive heading to Week 5 — *but* you almost assuredly will be in better shape moving forward than just about everyone else.

It may seem contradictory to pick a team that has a worse chance of "surviving" in something called a "survivor" pool. But that's because the name is a bit misleading.

Yes, the objective is to survive as long as you can. But the only winner is the last person standing.

FROM LEFT: COREY PERRINE/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION; CHRIS JONES-IMAGN IMAGES

2025 NFL Strength of Schedule

FROM MOST DIFFICULT TO EASIEST

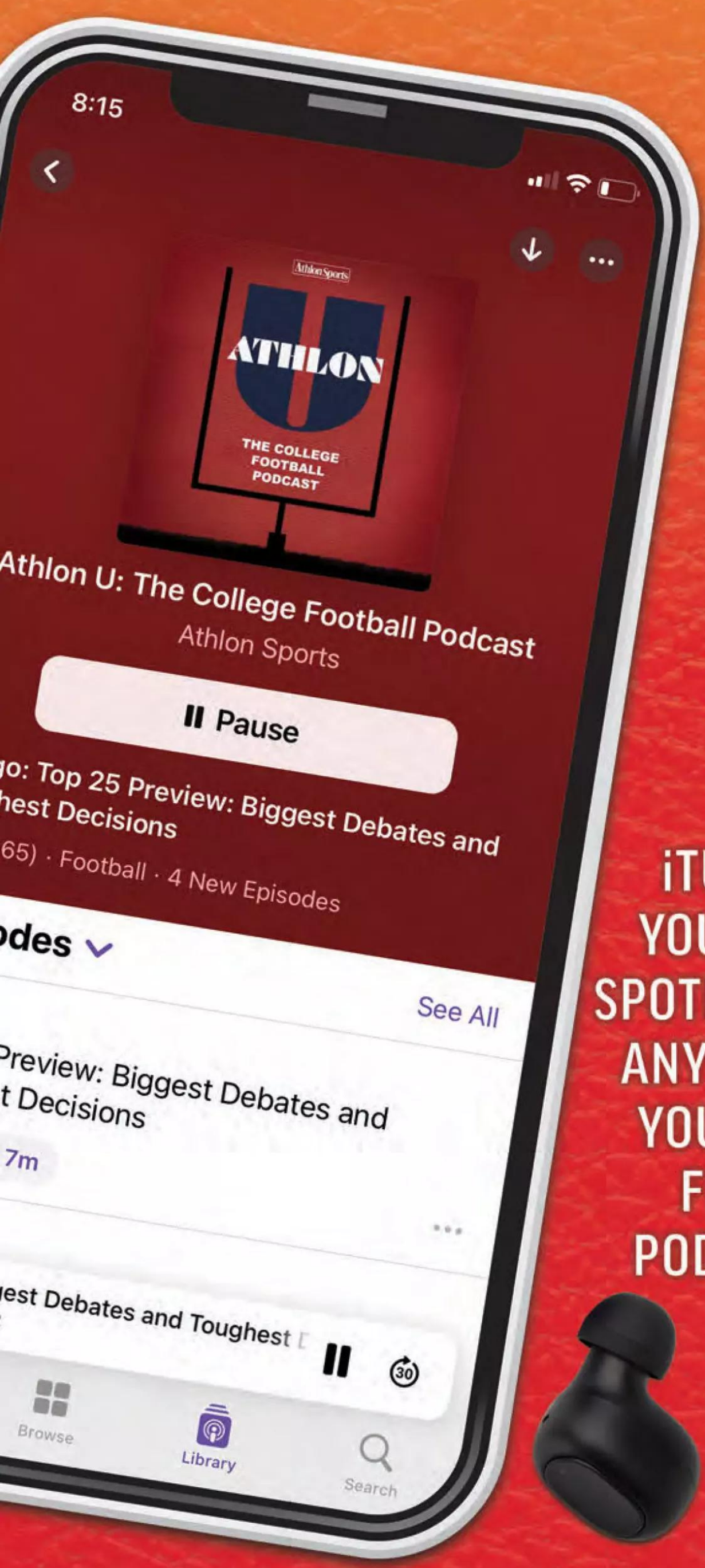
RK	TEAM	AVG OPP WIN TOTAL	2024 OPP WIN%	SCHEDULE STRENGTH
1	N.Y. Giants	9.1	.574	45.59
2	Detroit	9.0	.571	45.47
3	Cleveland	9.1	.571	45.31
4	Minnesota	8.9	.557	45.08
5	Kansas City	8.7	.522	44.79
6	Chicago	8.8	.571	44.62
7	Pittsburgh	8.8	.526	44.48
8	Philadelphia	8.8	.561	43.72
9	Baltimore	8.8	.533	43.61
10	Green Bay	8.7	.557	43.65
11	Houston	8.6	.481	43.59
12	Cincinnati	8.7	.509	43.24
13	Dallas	8.7	.557	43.11
14	Las Vegas	8.6	.502	43.09
15	L.A. Rams	8.5	.491	42.87
16	Washington	8.6	.550	42.69
17	N.Y. Jets	8.6	.460	42.63
18	L.A. Chargers	8.5	.522	42.58
19	Denver	8.6	.505	42.45
20	Indianapolis	8.4	.464	42.21
21	Arizona	8.3	.457	42.06
22	Seattle	8.4	.474	41.88
23	Tampa Bay	8.4	.481	41.74
24	Tennessee	8.3	.450	41.63
25	Jacksonville	8.3	.467	41.60
26	Miami	8.4	.474	41.38
27	Carolina	8.3	.457	41.15
28	Buffalo	8.4	.467	41.13
29	Atlanta	8.2	.478	40.96
30	New Orleans	8.1	.419	40.28
31	New England	7.9	.429	39.77
32	San Francisco	7.7	.415	38.79

**Strength of schedule rating is based on several factors, with opponents' win total projections carrying the most weight. Other factors include Super Bowl futures strength of schedule, bye-week timing, travel fatigue, rest differential, international-play participation, and difficult scheduling stretches.*

KYLE TERADA-USA TODAY SPORTS

Athlon Sports

ALL THINGS FOOTBALL – COLLEGE AND PRO



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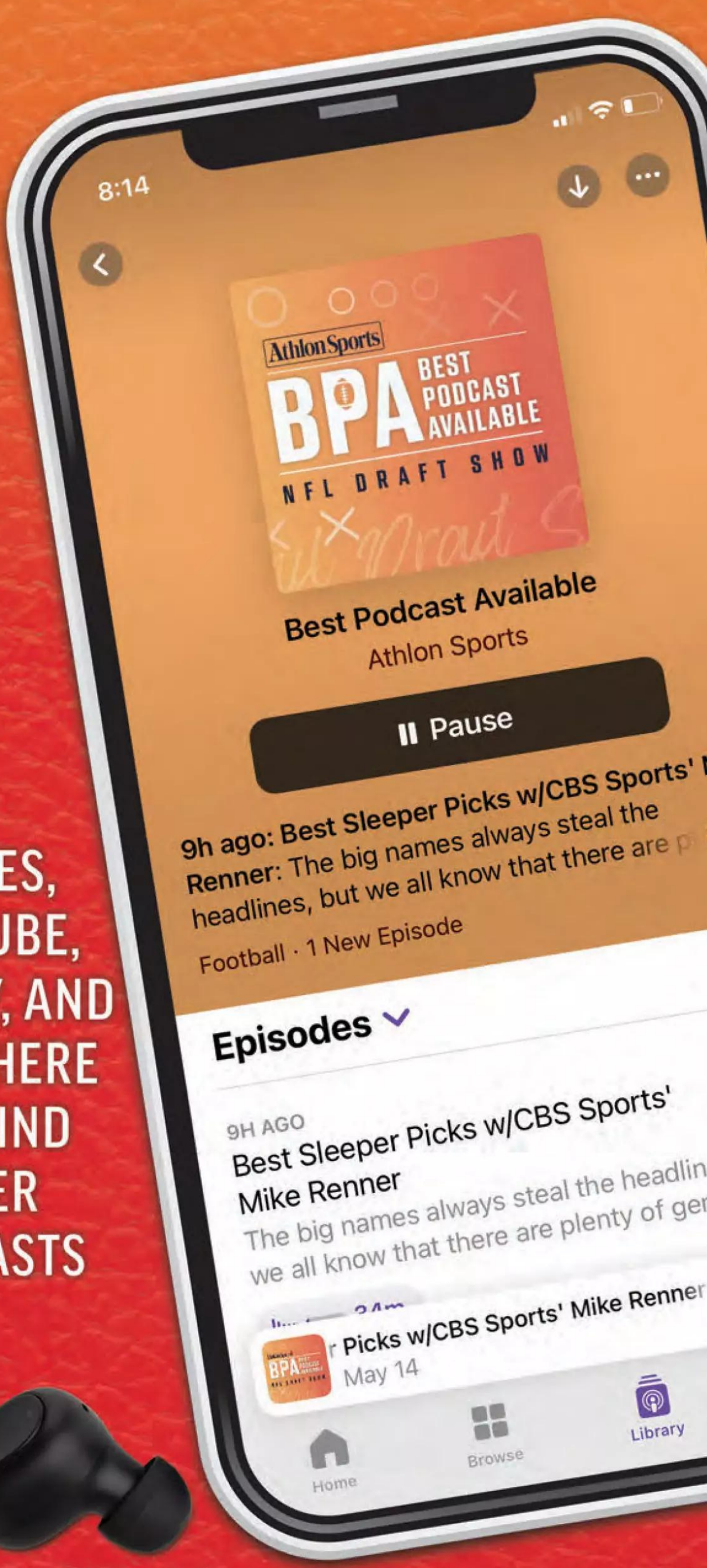


COLLEGE FOOTBALL BETTING PREVIEW

DANIEL DUNN-IMAGN IMAGES

BETTING PITFALLS OF A WHOLE NEW ERA IN CFB

By Doug Kezirian

While the SEC complains about its unimaginable two-year championship drought, college football has clearly entered a new era.

The two main reasons for this seismic shift: the new expanded playoff format, and the ability for athletes to transfer schools without skipping a year. And as is the case with any sports headline, these changes have had a domino effect in the betting market.

With the advent of the transfer portal, second- and third-tier programs now (theoretically) have a better chance to reach the College Football Playoff because top-tier programs can no longer stockpile ridiculous depth.

However, there's a counteraction at play here: With the playoffs having expanded from four to 12 teams (and, soon, 16), inferior squads still likely will be eliminated before college football's version of the Final Four is set.

"The SEC and Big Ten are just so much better than every other conference," said veteran oddsmaker Ed Salmons, vice president of risk and operations at the Westgate SuperBook in Las Vegas. "Texas played a dumb game against Arizona State [in last season's CFP], and the Sun Devils still couldn't win."

In the inaugural expanded 12-team playoff, fans rejoiced when schools like SMU, Indiana and Boise State were given a chance to win the national title. However, all three quickly got exposed.

In the end, we got bluebloods Ohio State and Notre Dame in the championship game.

"You still have a pretty good idea who will be there," said longtime oddsmaker Chris Andrews, director of the South Point sportsbook in Las Vegas. "Those mid-level teams maybe can now make a run at the playoffs like SMU did last year. But it's probably not as big a deal as many think."

The CFP Committee made things even tougher on the little guy during the offseason when it tweaked the seeding rules after just one year.

In 2024, the top four highest-ranked conference champions were awarded first-round byes. But after each top seed went one-and-done — including Arizona State and Boise State falling as double-digit underdogs — the top four teams in the final CFP poll will receive byes.

"The new format hinders and negates the advantage conference champions had," professional bettor Scott Pritchard said. "[Now] I will simply look to bet on a top-four team with a perceived favorable path based on the matchups with the best value and odds."

Indeed, oddsmakers and professional bettors have always adapted and adjusted as college football's winds blow. The key is fully grasping the complete impact and not sleeping on a longshot's worth.

"The transfer portal has jacked the [player] turnover equation through the roof — meaning a healthy portion of any data you'd look at for 2024 may be irrelevant or tainted [in 2025]," said Jim Sannes, FanDuel's research managing editor. "With the bigger conferences, the gap between the toughest Big Ten schedule and the easiest one is now larger than it used to be, making that consideration — which was already paramount — an even bigger part of the equation."

To Sannes' point: The top six favorites to win the 2025 CFP hail from either the SEC or Big Ten.

So maybe order has been restored — even in this new era.

BRETT DAVIS-IMAGN IMAGES

IT'S NOT ALWAYS WHERE YOU START...

2023 JAYDEN DANIELS

2019 JOE BURROW

2015 DERRICK HENRY

2011 ROBERT GRIFFIN

WEEK 1 ODDS FOR THE LAST
15 HEISMAN TROPHY WINNERS

YEAR	WINNER	POS	SCHOOL	WK 1 ODDS	RANK
2024	TRAVIS HUNTER	WR/CB	Colorado	+5000	22nd
2023	JAYDEN DANIELS	QB	LSU	+1000	2nd
2022	CALEB WILLIAMS	QB	USC	+600	3rd
2021	BRYCE YOUNG	QB	Alabama	+800	3rd
2020	DEVONTA SMITH	WR	Alabama	+10000	NR
2019	JOE BURROW	QB	LSU	+4000	11th
2018	KYLER MURRAY	QB	Oklahoma	+3000	13th
2017	BAKER MAYFIELD	QB	Oklahoma	+1000	3rd
2016	LAMAR JACKSON	QB	Louisville	+10000	29th
2015	DERRICK HENRY	RB	Alabama	+2500	11th
2014	MARCUS MARIOTA	QB	Oregon	+425	1st
2013	JAMEIS WINSTON	QB	FSU	Off	NR
2012	JOHNNY MANZIEL	QB	Texas A&M	Off	NR
2011	ROBERT GRIFFIN III	QB	Baylor	+2800	13th
2010	CAM NEWTON	QB	Auburn	Off	NR

2024
TRAVIS HUNTER

HUNTER: TODD VAN EMST/HEISMAN TRUST VIA IMAGN IMAGES;
LEFT, FROM TOP: BRAD PENNER-USA TODAY SPORTS (3); USA TO

BY MICHAEL LEBOFF

HEISMAN DARK HORSES

John Mateer

At the end of last season, it wasn't surprising that Travis Hunter won the Heisman Trophy. The two-way sensation was a football unicorn and played a vital role in a hugely successful campaign for Colorado.

Hunter established himself as a contender early and never fell out of the running. But that's not how things started. Before the season kicked off in Dublin, Hunter wasn't even among the top-20 favorites to win the award. He was 50/1 and well behind the likes of preseason-favorite Dillon Gabriel (+700), Carson Beck, Quinn Ewers, Avery Johnson, and Riley Leonard.

Part of the reason for Hunter's long price was his position. Quarterbacks had won 12 of the previous 14 Heisman Trophies, so bookmakers always load the top of the board with signal-callers. That is the case once again in 2025, with Texas' Arch Manning leading the way as the favorite across the market.

Three of the next four players on the betting board – LSU's Garrett Nussmeier, Clemson's Cade Klubnik and Penn State's Drew Allar – are uarterbacks. There is, however, a non-QB in the top five: Ohio State wideout Jeremiah Smith is fourth at 13/1 to win, well short of where Hunter was at this time last year.

The 2025 favorites will be tough to beat, especially with the media attention Manning will get throughout the year, but that doesn't mean we won't see yet another dark horse take home the Heisman. Here are three long shots to consider:

JOHN MATEER QB, Oklahoma (35/1, DraftKings)

One of the quiet breakout performers from 2024, Mateer put up some eye-popping numbers at Washington State. He roasted defenses for 3,139 yards and 29 touchdowns but flew under the radar because Wazzu was left in the college football wilderness after the Pac-12 went kaput. He now looks to replicate the success Cam Ward had after leaving Pullman for Miami. If he can repeat what he did last year, Mateer should be in the Heisman mix.

Kevin Jennings

KEVIN JENNINGS QB, SMU (50/1, BetMGM)

If SMU is going to build on its resurgent season from a year ago, it will come down to Jennings taking another step forward after a massive showing in 2024 (3,245 yards, 23 touchdowns). After bulking up in the spring and adding more than 10 pounds of muscle to his 6-foot, 185-pound frame, Jennings should have every chance to lead the Pony Express back to the College Football Playoff and add to those totals in 2025.

Jeremiyah Love

JEREMIYAH LOVE RB, Notre Dame (50/1,FanDuel)

The Irish are a throwback team that wants to ground-and-pound, which means they'll be relying heavily on Love to do a lot of the heavy lifting. The junior from St. Louis racked up 1,125 yards and 17 touchdowns on 163 carries in 2024, leading Notre Dame to the national title game. The Irish are 15/1 to win the national championship in 2025, and if they're in the mix, it will likely be because Love improves on a terrific 2024 season. That alone would make him worthy of a bet at this price.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: SARAH PHIPPS/THE OKLAHOMAN; MATT CASHORE-IMAGN IMAGES; JEROME MIRON-IMAGN IMAGES

4 College Football CARDINAL BETTING RULES

By Michael Leboff

Florida State was one of the trendiest teams in the country going into the 2024 season. Coming off an undefeated season, the Seminoles had a high-pedigree quarterback joining the roster and a manageable schedule.

It seemed as if the entire world was on the FSU bandwagon, and all that love made the job of the sportsbooks pretty easy when it came to pricing the 'Noles in the futures market. The bookies knew that they were going to get action on Florida State no matter how short they made the prices.

And it wasn't just casual money coming in on the 'Noles. There were a lot of professional bettors backing Florida State to be the cream of the crop in the ACC, and potentially contend for the National Championship.

It felt foolish to step in front of the hype train, but the 2024 Seminoles served as a reminder of one of the cardinal rules in betting futures, especially when it comes to college football. Let's discuss that all-important commandment and add a few more to keep in mind as you set up your betting portfolio for the 2025 college football season.

CARDINAL RULE NO. 1: Fight the hype

Every year, there is at least one team that attracts an outsized amount of attention from the betting world. In 2024, it was FSU (30/1) and Utah (40/1), top-12 teams on the ational title preseason betting board that went a combined 7-17 overall.

That isn't to say the hype-machine teams will always fall flat, but it is a reminder that things can go wrong quickly in college football, and there's no margin for error when you're betting teams with immense support behind them.

One injury, a couple of bad bounces, or some poor performances can torpedo a season – and a futures bet – in the blink of an eye.

Teams that fit the bill in 2025: Notre Dame (10.5 win total), Penn State (10.5), BYU (8.5) and Illinois (7.5).

CARDINAL RULE NO. 2: Buy low

The next step for Rule 1 is to buy low on post-hype teams. You'll likely get a decent price to jump on the bandwagon while everyone else abandons ship.

CARDINAL RULE NO. 3: Don't delay the play

Because college football is a fall and winter sport, the majority of bettors won't put money down until right before the season starts. The market, however, generally settles well before Week 0.

Professional bettors snap up opening numbers, like win totals and conference futures, that are released in the spring, which means the sportsbooks have a good idea of where each team should be priced weeks before the season starts.

That doesn't mean you should avoid betting college football futures after July 4, but it is important to remember that you should do what you can to beat the market, rather than bet into it.

CARDINAL RULE NO. 4: Do your homework

Whether it's paying attention to the transfer portal or going through each team's strength of schedule, it's imperative to stay on top of the ball in a sport with as many moving parts as college football. Just doing your homework will provide you with a good foundation to set yourself up for success.

TOM MAHER/INPHO VIA USA TODAY SPORTS

My Three Favorite

WIN TOTAL WAGERS IN College Football

BY DOUG KEZIRIAN

NORTH CAROLINA 7.5 WINS: UNDER (-138)

BOB DONNAN-IMAGN IMAGES

Whether or not you believe the neverending off-field rumors, Bill Belichick is inarguably different from the guy who ruled the sidelines (and front office) in Foxboro for 24 years.

The curmudgeon prided himself on irking the media by answering questions with minimal words and dismissive tones. He toed the line of disrespectful, occasionally crossing it, all while wearing an unapologetic badge with honor.

Now the legendary New England Patriots head coach has his first college gig. And it's coincided with a personality makeover, from increased media access to the 73-year-old sharing his very public relationship with 24-year-old Jordon Hudson on social media.

The gossip is intriguing and often baffling, given Belichick's track record of mystery and silence. But the intense national interest that North Carolina undoubtedly will receive all season won't necessarily be in the best interests of the Tar Heels' players. In fact, there's an excellent chance that the presence of Hudson — who is unlikely to fade into the background when the season kicks off — will be a huge distraction.

Every genius eventually develops blind spots, and it appears we've reached that point with Belichick. That's why North Carolina Under 7.5 wins (-176) is my favorite win total bet this season.

Here are two others I'm targeting:

WASHINGTON UNDER 7.5 WINS (-142)

Jeff Fisch is a fantastic coach and has seemingly strengthened his staff. My issue is a brutal schedule that eventually will catch up with the Huskies — especially if quarterback Demon Williams Jr. is not the star or savior Fisch (and fans) envision.

About that schedule: Washington faces five opponents off bye weeks. Also, after going 0-for-5 on the road in their first Big Ten season, the Huskies must travel to Maryland, Michigan and Wisconsin (as well as UCLA and Washington State).

Washington's home slate is no picnic, either, with games against defending champion Ohio State and Oregon.

MISSOURI OVER 7.5 WINS (+100)

Speaking of schedules, Missouri catches arguably the biggest scheduling break in the country: not a single road game until Oct. 18. In all, the Tigers will take just four road trips — and the opponents are far from daunting (Auburn, Vanderbilt, Oklahoma and Arkansas).

Granted, Missouri will be an underdog at home against Alabama, Texas A&M and possibly even South Carolina. But the other teams that will visit Columbia — Central Arkansas (FCS), Kansas, Louisiana-Lafayette, UMass and Mississippi State — are all beatable.

The Tigers do have to replace standout QB Brady Cook, a chore that figures to fall to Penn State transfer Beau Pribula. Regardless of who is under center, coach Eli Drinkwitz has a knack for maximizing his talent. Thanks to a soft schedule, he should be able to do it again.

Four FUN COLLEGE FOOTBALL FUTURES BETS

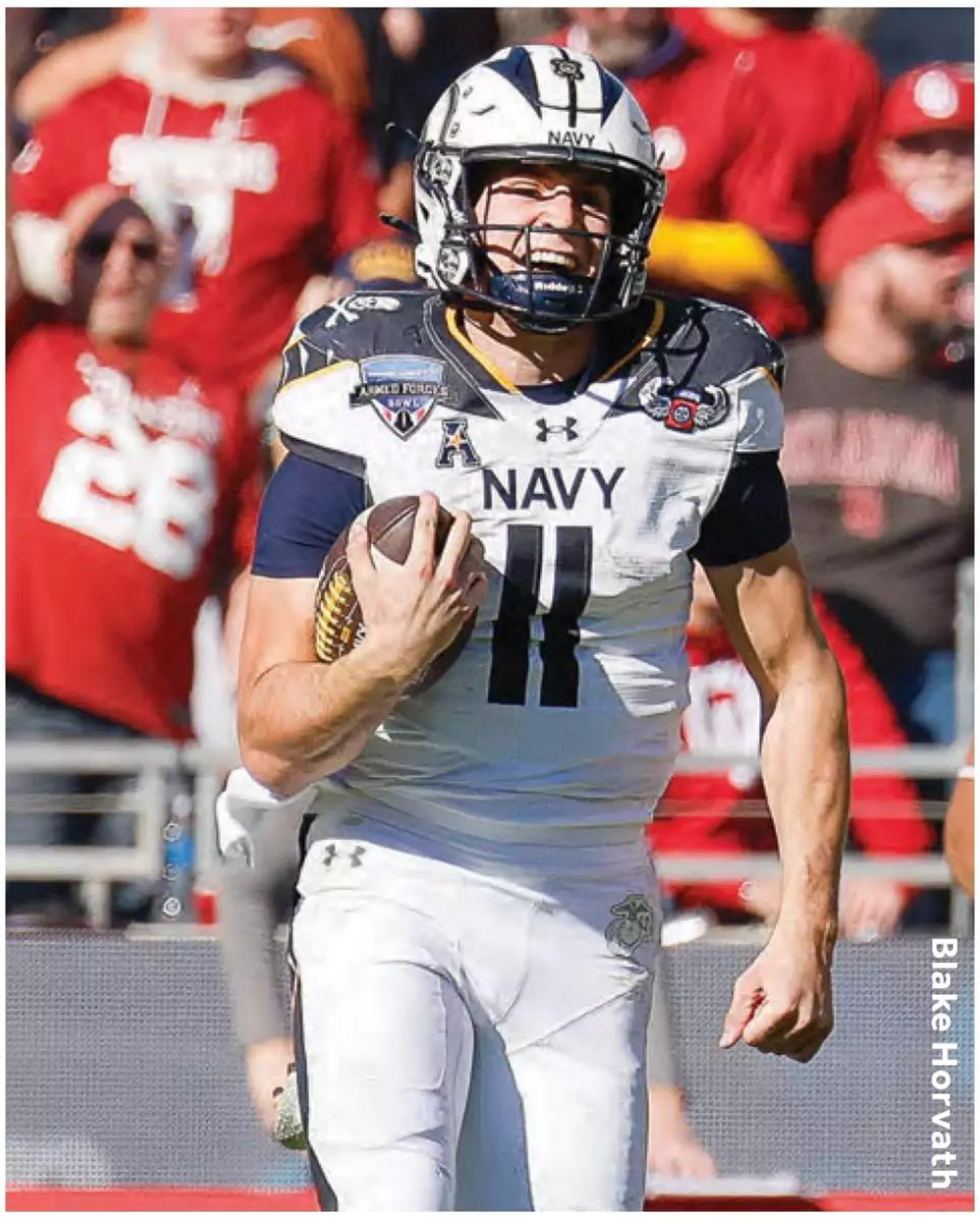
A bettor's primary job is to do whatever it takes to find an edge. The endless hunt for value is a grind, requiring consistent discipline that can sometimes suck the fun out of sports. And while serious bettors interested in long-term success should leave emotion on the sidelines as much as possible, it is OK to occasionally let your hair down and responsibly place a fun bet that keeps you invested for the entire season.

With that concept in mind, I've highlighted five college football futures bets that should provide heaps of fun to sweat in 2025.

BLAKE HORVATH to win Heisman Trophy (500/1, BetMGM)

Navy put together a stunning 10-win season in 2024 and was in the College Football Playoff conversation until a blowout loss to Notre Dame right before Halloween. Quarterback Blake Horvath was the catalyst behind the Midshipmen's resurgence, recording 30 total touchdowns (13 passing, 17 rushing).

Horvath once again will headline Navy's triple-offense attack in 2025, giving the junior every opportunity to post big totals again. With plenty of returning production on offense, Navy is expected to be a serious player in the Group of 5 conversation this season. If that indeed materializes, Horvath could be on the fringes of the Heisman radar — at which point this 500/1 price will be long gone.



Blake Horvath

LaNorris Sellers

TULSA to win AAC (200/1, DraftKings)

Sometimes a coaching change can completely alter a program's trajectory, and that's what we're betting on happening here. Tulsa made a splash in the offseason by hiring 35-year-old Tre Lamb from East Tennessee State, banking on Lamb's offensive chops to reinvigorate a team that has been listless for the better part of a decade.

If Lamb can have some early success with his innovative system, the Golden Hurricane could be a surprise runner in the AAC and catch the market by storm. Is it a lot to ask? Yes — but that's why the odds are so long.

NORTH CAROLINA Under 7.5 wins (-176, FanDuel)

Perhaps no team will be harder to handicap in the early stages of 2025 than Bill Belichick's UNC Tar Heels. There will be massive distractions around the program with Belichick and his, uh, entourage in Chapel Hill, and there is every chance this experiment goes sideways in a hurry. A relatively soft schedule will help the Tar Heels, but this will be a fun team for bettors to fade all season. Don't be afraid to play the Under on some alternate UNC win totals when those get posted later in the summer.

LaNORRIS SELLERS to go No. 1 overall in 2026 NFL Draft (22/1, bet365)

Texas QB Arch Manning is the clear favorite to be the first pick in the 2026 NFL Draft, but don't be surprised if South Carolina's LaNorris Sellers, fifth on the betting board to go No. 1, joins the debate. Manning undoubtedly will be the biggest name in college football this season, but Sellers has the toolkit to surge past Manning in the eyes of pro scouts. Honestly, Sellers might be the most entertaining player in the country this season, so I'd look to invest in the dual-threat quarterback in some fashion. This seems like the most fun way to jump on the bandwagon.

FROM LEFT: ANDREW DIEB-IMAGN IMAGES; JEFF BLAKE-IMAGN IMAGES

2025 COLLEGE FOOTBALL National Title Odds

TEAM	ODDS
Texas	+550
Ohio State	+600
Georgia	+650
Penn State	+800
Oregon	+900
Alabama	10/1
Clemson	14/1
Notre Dame	14/1
LSU	17/1
Ole Miss	28/1
Michigan	37/1
Texas A&M	37/1
Miami	42/1
Florida	44/1
Oklahoma	50/1
Auburn	50/1
Tennessee	55/1
South Carolina	55/1
Louisville	80/1
SMU	90/1
USC	100/1
Kansas State	110/1
Utah	120/1
Texas Tech	120/1
Arizona State	130/1

TEAM	ODDS
Missouri	130/1
Iowa	140/1
Illinois	140/1
Georgia Tech	160/1
Nebraska	160/1
Indiana	160/1
Baylor	170/1
Washington	180/1
TCU	200/1
BYU	210/1
Iowa State	270/1
Arkansas	370/1
Duke	390/1
Virginia Tech	430/1
Kansas	490/1
Michigan St.	500/1
North Carolina	600/1
Boise State	600/1
Minnesota	600/1
Wisconsin	700/1
Syracuse	700/1
Kentucky	750/1
Florida State	750/1
Pittsburgh	800/1
Colorado	800/1

TEAM	ODDS
West Virginia	850/1
Rutgers	850/1
Tulane	950/1
Arizona	1000/1
Boston College	1000/1
Colorado St.	1000/1
Houston	1000/1
Maryland	1000/1
Miss. State	1000/1
Northwestern	1000/1
Oklahoma St.	1000/1
Purdue	1000/1
Stanford	1000/1
Vanderbilt	1000/1
Virginia	1000/1
Wake Forest	1000/1
Oregon State	1000/1
Washington St.	1000/1
Navy	1000/1
Liberty	1000/1
UNLV	1000/1
Toledo	1000/1
Army	1000/1
Air Force	1000/1

NATTY BETTING TIERS

BY MICHAEL LEBOFF

The days of a consensus, runaway national championship favorite in college football are over — at least for now.

As bettors and fans, we grew accustomed to seeing bluebloods like Alabama, Georgia, Clemson, and Ohio State regularly top the preseason betting boards at very short prices. However, that's all changed with college football's new landscape.

The expanded College Football Playoff, NIL contracts, the transfer portal — all of it helped usher in a much more unpredictable time in the sport. Which in turn has provided some terrific betting opportunities in the futures market that just weren't there in recent eras.

With those opportunities front of mind, we've plucked our favorite National Championship futures from each section of the betting board.

Cade Klubnik

TIER I: Favorites (20/1 or shorter)

CLEMSON (14/1)

The Tigers return the most offensive production in the nation, and the heart of that production is quarterback and Heisman Trophy candidate Cade Klubnik. Clemson's schedule is more than manageable, and Dabo Swinney's squad gets an opportunity to make an immediate (and loud) statement in Week 1 when LSU visits Death Valley.

TIER II: Contenders (between 20/1 and 40/1)

TEXAS A&M (37/1)

There are a handful of trendy national championship contenders in this price range, but Texas A&M stands out as the best bet. The Aggies return 71% of their production from 2024 (including every offensive starter) and will be in Year 2 of the Mike Elko era. A lot of folks were bullish on what Elko could accomplish in College Station, and there's no reason to jump off that bandwagon for 2025. Residing in the SEC, Texas A&M's schedule is brutal. But that shouldn't make the Aggies a throwaway in the national championship picture — remember, Alabama nearly got into the 12-team tournament last year with three losses.

TIER III: Sleepers (between 40/1 and 100/1)

FLORIDA (40/1, ESPN BET)

There really aren't many viable candidates beyond the previous tier. That said, it's hard to resist taking a shot with the Gators after what we saw in 2024. Billy Napier's team finished 8-5 overall and 4-4 in the SEC, which is quite a feat considering the schedule included a non-conference clash with Miami, and SEC road games against top-10 opponents Tennessee, Georgia and Texas.

The Gators have a potential star under center with DJ Lagway, and he's got plenty of weapons to work with after Napier made a couple of key acquisitions in the portal. Another tough schedule awaits, but there's enough upside to roll the dice on the Gators at a juicy national title price.

TIER IV: Longshot (100/1 or longer)

UTAH (100/1)

This is a terrific buy-low opportunity on a team that was picked to win the Big 12 each of the past two seasons, only to go a combined 13-12 and burn Utah backers in the process. With new offensive coordinator Jason Beck and quarterback Devon Dampier both coming over from New Mexico, there is reason to believe the Utes can reverse their underachieving ways. Regardless, this team has a higher ceiling than the futures market suggests, even if the price has come down considerably from opening odds as high as 200/1.

JEROME MIRON-IMAGN IMAGES

TOP 50 COLLEGE FOOTBALL POWER RATINGS

No.	TEAM	CONF	WIN TOTAL	SOS*	RATING
1	Texas	SEC	9.5	25	31.5
2	Penn State	B1G	10.5	59	30.0
3	Ohio State	B1G	10.5	11	29.5
4	Clemson	ACC	9.5	34	29.0
5	Georgia	SEC	9.5	40	29.0
6	Notre Dame	IND	10.5	42	27.5
7	Oregon	B1G	10.5	21	27.0
8	Alabama	SEC	9.5	7	26.0
9	LSU	SEC	8.5	27	25.0
10	Miami (Fla.)	ACC	8.5	23	23.5
11	Illinois	B1G	8.5	41	22.0
12	Tennessee	SEC	8.5	38	21.5
13	Kansas State	B12	8.5	54	19.5
14	Ole Miss	SEC	8.5	28	19.5
15	Michigan	B1G	8.5	31	19.5
16	Arizona State	B12	8.5	57	18.5
17	South Carolina	SEC	7.5	8	18.0
18	BYU	B12	8.5	53	17.5
19	Florida	SEC	7.5	1	16.0
20	Texas A&M	SEC	7.5	9	15.5
21	Iowa State	B12	7.5	44	15.5
22	Oklahoma	SEC	6.5	5	14.5
23	Indiana	B1G	8.5	47	13.0
24	TCU	B12	6.5	32	13.0
25	Auburn	SEC	7.5	26	12.5

No.	TEAM	CONF	WIN TOTAL	SOS*	RATING
26	Nebraska	B1G	7.5	37	12.5
27	Louisville	ACC	8.5	63	12.0
28	SMU	ACC	8.5	49	11.0
29	Texas Tech	B12	8.5	61	11.0
30	Boise State	MWC	9.5	89	10.5
31	Missouri	SEC	7.5	45	10.5
32	Iowa	B1G	7.5	17	10.0
33	USC	B1G	7.5	19	10.0
34	Baylor	B12	7.5	50	9.0
35	Georgia Tech	ACC	7.5	57	8.5
36	UNLV	MWC	8.5	96	8.5
37	Utah	B12	7.5	35	8.0
38	Washington	B1G	7.5	24	7.5
39	Kansas	B12	7.5	58	7.0
40	Virginia Tech	ACC	6.5	63	7.0
41	Tulane	AAC	8.5	71	6.5
42	Minnesota	B1G	6.5	30	6.0
43	Arkansas	SEC	5.5	4	6.0
44	Duke	ACC	6.5	52	5.5
45	Kentucky	SEC	4.5	10	5.5
46	Rutgers	B1G	5.5	22	5.0
47	UCF	B12	5.5	79	5.0
48	Colorado	B12	6.5	43	4.5
49	Florida State	ACC	7.5	52	4.5
50	North Carolina	ACC	7.5	69	4.5

*Strength of schedule ranking among 134 FBS football teams; the lower the number, the tougher the schedule.

PREVIEW

POWER 4

SEC

BY MATT JACOB

BEST WIN TOTAL BET: MISSOURI OVER 7.5 (+100)

Missouri entered the 2024 season with a win total projection as high as 9.5. And all the Tigers did was exceed expectations by finishing 10-3.

This year, oddsmakers see Missouri taking a bit of a step back, even though the Tigers' combined recruiting and transfer portal classes were ranked in the top 10 by one prominent national media outlet.

What's more, those newcomers (and holdovers) are blessed with an extremely favorable 2025 schedule. Missouri not only will play its first six games at home but it probably will be favored in five of them.

The lone exception? A Week 7 clash with Alabama. However, the Tigers will be coming off a bye when they host the Tide. After that, Missouri will board a plane for the first time when the Tigers travel to Auburn on Oct. 18.

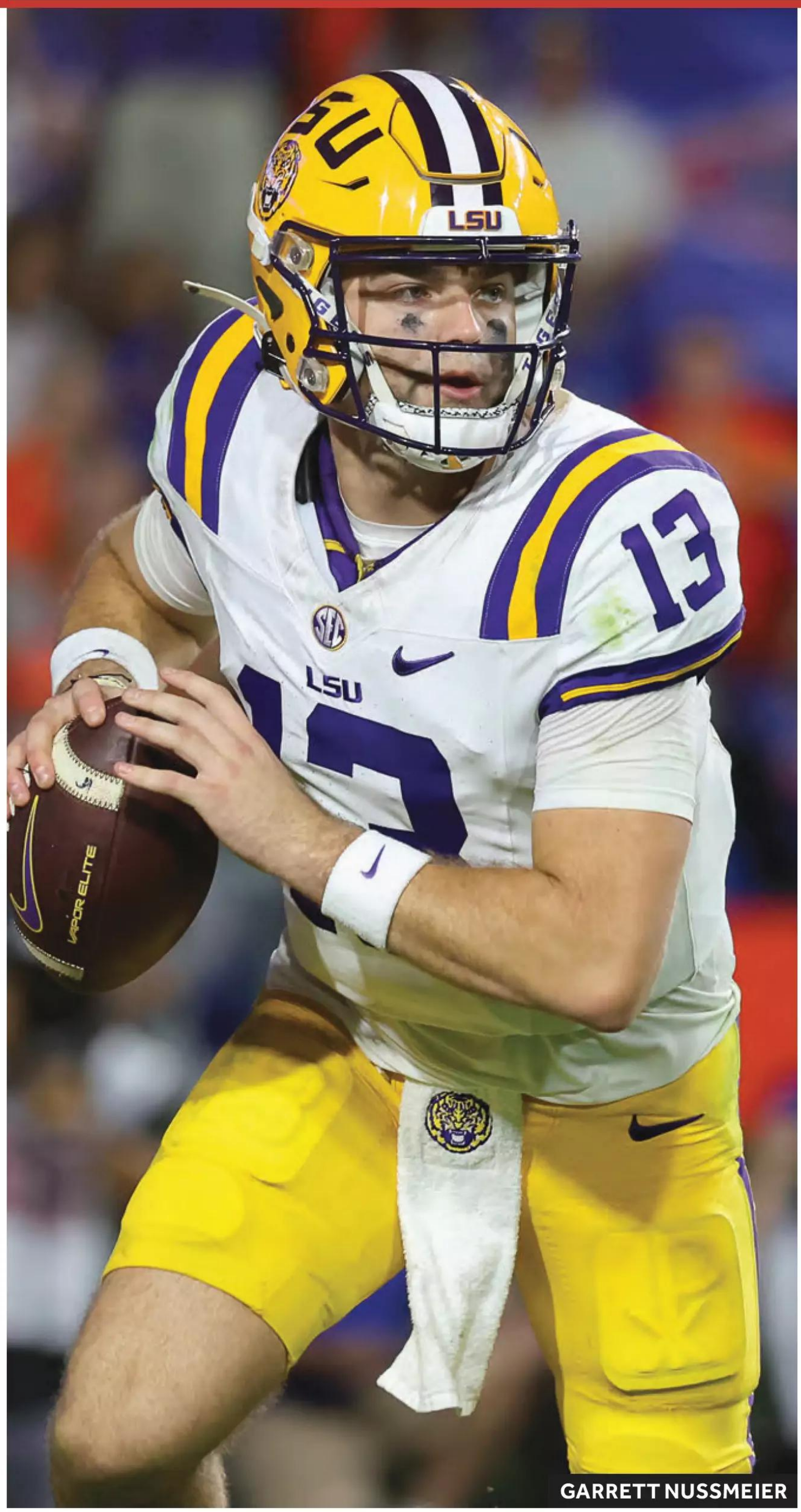
In all, the Tigers will play just four road games. The situation is tricky (two back-to-back trips a month apart), but the opponents — Auburn, Vanderbilt, Oklahoma and Arkansas — are all beatable.

BEST BET TO WIN SEC: LSU (+750)

It's tempting to play it safe and roll with one of the top three favorites — Texas, Georgia or Alabama. However, the potential return on investment is minimal. LSU, on the other hand, offers solid bank-for-the-buck value at its preseason odds.

The Tigers closed last season on a three-game winning streak, and they did it by averaging 32.3 points per game. Quarterback Garrett Nussmeier is back for his junior season. He's also the consensus second choice to win the Heisman Trophy.

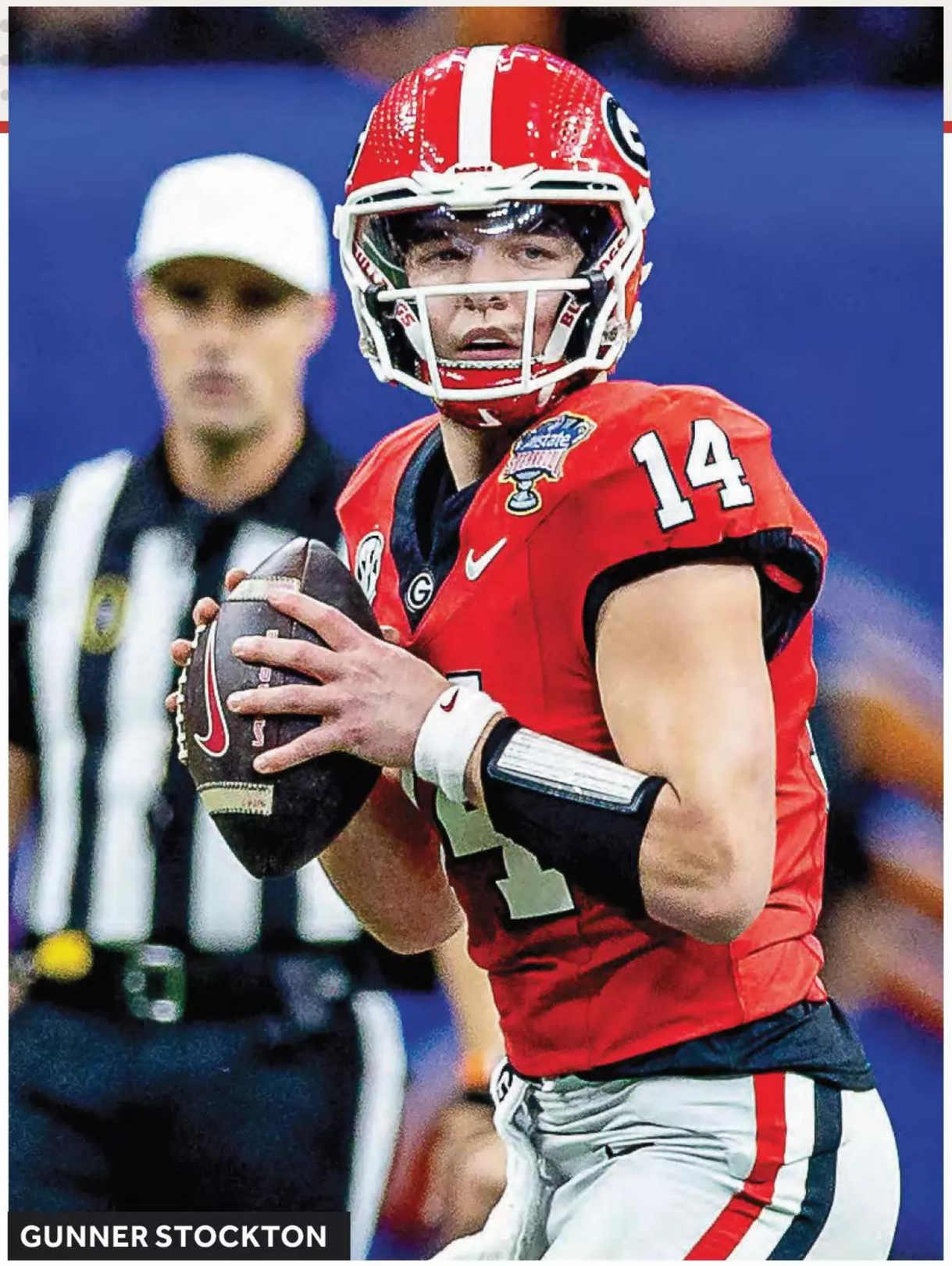
A big reason why: LSU coach Brian Kelly landed a slew of offensive weapons in the transfer portal. He also effectively used the portal to bolster a defense that gave up more than 30 points four times in 2024.



GARRETT NUSSMEIER

KIM KLEMENT NEITZEL-IMAGN IMAGES

SEC



GUNNER STOCKTON

2025 SEC ODDS

TEAM	2024 W-L	2024 ATS	2024 MOV	2025 WIN TOTAL (O/U)	SEC CHAMP	CFP CHAMP
Texas	13-3	8-8-0	+17.7	9.5 (-188/+152)	+300	+550
Georgia	11-3	4-10-0	+10.9	9.5 (-158/+128)	+300	+650
Alabama	9-4	7-6-0	+16.4	9.5 (-104/-118)	+480	+1000
LSU	9-4	5-8-0	+6.2	8.5 (-134/+110)	+750	+1800
Ole Miss	10-3	8-5-0	+24.2	8.5 (-170/+138)	+1300	+2700
Tennessee	10-3	7-6-0	+19.6	8.5 (-118/-104)	+2400	+5000
Texas A&M	8-5	3-10-0	+8.2	7.5 (-160/+130)	+1500	+3700
Florida	8-5	9-4-0	+5.2	7.5 (+120/-148)	+2000	+4100
Auburn	5-7	6-6-0	+6.5	7.5 (-158/+128)	+2100	+5500
South Carolina	9-4	9-4-0	+12.4	7.5 (+106/-130)	+2500	+5000
Missouri	10-3	9-4-0	+8.5	7.5 (+100/-122)	+5000	+15000
Oklahoma	6-7	6-7-0	+2.5	6.5 (-162/+132)	+2500	+5500
Arkansas	7-6	8-5-0	+5.9	5.5 (+120/-148)	+19000	+43000
Vanderbilt	7-6	9-4-0	+3.9	4.5 (-164/+134)	+30000	+100000
Kentucky	4-8	7-5-0	-1.5	4.5 (-114/-106)	+30000	+85000
Mississippi St.	2-10	7-5-0	-8.3	3.5 (-138/+112)	+30000	+100000

STEPHEN LEW-IMAGN IMAGES

Like every SEC team, LSU's schedule is rife with land mines. However, the Tigers have all summer to prepare for the season opener at Clemson; they have a bye before going to Alabama; and they don't have any back-to-back road trips. Perhaps most importantly, LSU does not have to play Texas or Georgia.

BEST BET TO WIN NATIONAL TITLE: GEORGIA (+650)

"Back to business" will likely be the rallying cry in Georgia's locker room when the 2025 season commences. After posting a combined 29-1 record and winning back-to-back national titles in 2021 and 2022, the Bulldogs' attempt at an unprecedented three-peat came up short when they failed to qualify for the 2023 College Football Playoff.

Georgia returned to the tournament last year when the field expanded to 12 teams, but it went one-and-done, losing a quarterfinal game to Notre Dame.

Thanks in large part to a top-tier class of newcomers and a scheduling break, oddsmakers have Georgia as the third choice to win the national title. About that scheduling break: The Bulldogs' three toughest opponents — Alabama, Ole Miss and Texas — all visit Athens.

WEEK 1 BEST BET: LSU AT CLEMSON

LSU gets a chance to make an immediate statement when it visits Clemson in one of the most-anticipated matchups in Week 1.

Clemson opened as a small favorite, which makes sense for two reasons: The game is in Death Valley, and Clemson's national title odds are slightly shorter than LSU's (both teams are among the top nine favorites to win it all).

The two programs being side-by-side in the national championship futures market isn't the only shared similarity. Both offenses will be piloted by experienced and prolific starting quarterbacks — Clemson's Cade Klubnic (3,639 yards, 36 touchdowns, six interceptions last year) and LSU's Garrett Nussmeier (4,052 passing yards, 29 touchdowns, 12 interceptions).

Also, both coaches — Clemson's Dabo Swinney and LSU's Brian Kelly — aggressively dove into the transfer portal and landed players who are expected to make an immediate impact on both sides of the ball.

In other words, this is shaping up to be a clash between evenly matched opponents with similar strengths and weaknesses. So your best bet is to take the points.

PICK: LSU (+2.5, -102)

PREVIEW

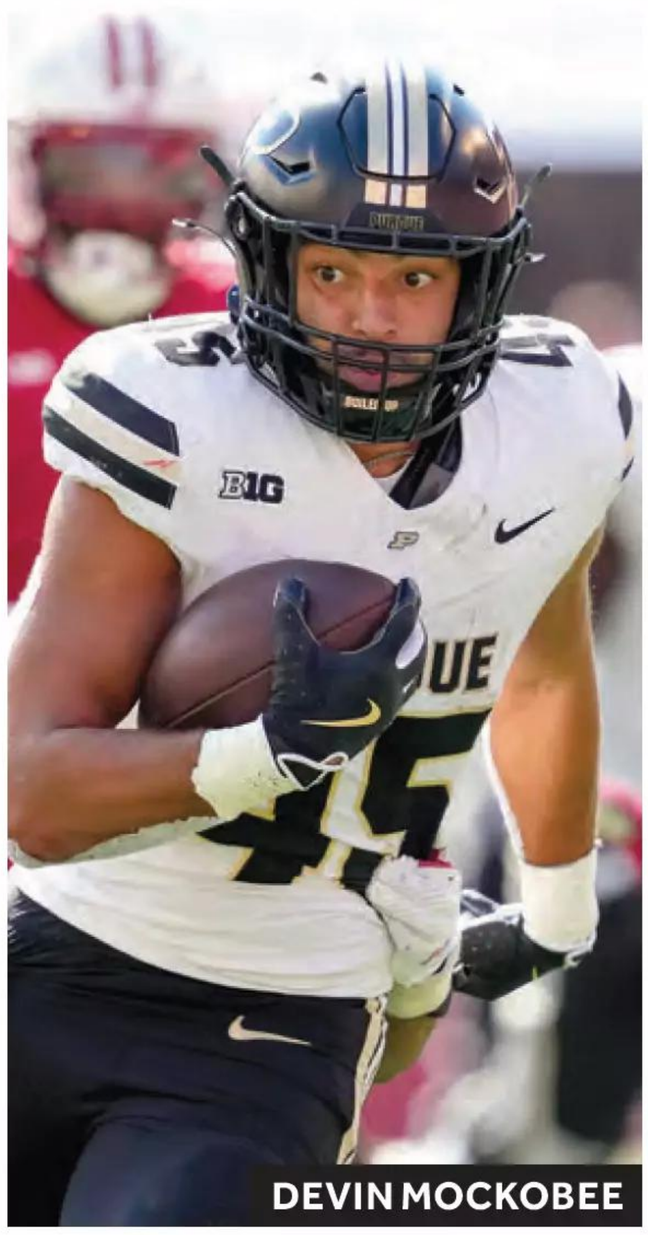
POWER 4

BIG TEN

BY MATT JACOB

BEST WIN TOTAL BET:
PURDUE OVER 3.5 WINS (+180)

No Big Ten team enters this season with lower expectations (and a lower projected win total) than Purdue. And for good reason: Last year, the Boilermakers opened with a 49-0 blowout of Indiana State and never tasted victory again, finishing 1-11.



DEVIN MOCKOBEE

So why trust Purdue to at least quadruple its win total in 2025? Two words: Barry Odom.

The Boilermakers' new head coach arrives in West Lafayette after resurrecting a UNLV program that had been comatose for nearly three decades.

In two seasons under Odom, the Rebels went 20-8, reached back-to-back MWC championships, and earned their first top-25 ranking in program history.

Perspective: UNLV had 20 wins total in the previous six years and had posted just two winning seasons from 1995-2022.

So how can Odom get Purdue to four victories in 2025? Simple: Start the season by beating two cupcakes (Ball State and Southern Illinois), then pick off two more wins in the final 10 games against such lower-tier conference foes as Minnesota, Northwestern and Rutgers.

BEST BET TO WIN BIG TEN: MICHIGAN (+1000)

Ohio State, Penn State and Oregon strut into the 2025 season as the definitive teams to beat in a top-heavy Big Ten. They also each carry Big Ten title odds of less than 3-to-1.

So you can back one of the three (for a nominal potential return on investment). Or you can grab 9-to-1 odds with a Michigan squad that is stocked with blue-chip talent and has a soft 2025 schedule.

Regarding the latter: The Wolverines avoid Penn State and Oregon in the regular season. As a result, the 2024 champs could be favored in every game until hosting Ohio State in the regular season finale.

BRYCE UNDERWOOD

FROM LEFT: JEFF HANISCH-IMAGN IMAGES; JUNFU HAN

BIG TEN

JEREMIAH SMITH

BRETT DAVIS-IMAGN IMAGES

2025 BIG TEN ODDS

TEAM	2024 W-L	2024 ATS	2024 MOV	2025 WIN TOTAL (O/U)	BIG TEN CHAMP	CFP CHAMP
Ohio State	14-2	10-6-0	+22.8	10.5 (+106/-130)	+185	+600
Penn State	13-3	8-8-0	+16.6	10.5 (+118/-144)	+260	+800
Oregon	13-1	7-7-0	+15.4	10.5 (+102/-124)	+290	+850
Michigan	8-5	6-7-0	+2.1	8.5 (-160/+135)	+1000	+3900
Illinois	10-3	9-3-1	+6.6	8.5 (+108/-132)	+3200	+12000
Indiana	11-2	9-4-0	+25.7	8.5 (+124/-152)	+4500	+18000
USC	7-6	8-5-0	+6.1	7.5 (-132/+108)	+2500	+10000
Iowa	8-5	6-6-1	+9.8	7.5 (+130/-160)	+3300	+15000
Nebraska	7-6	7-4-2	+4.1	7.5 (-134/+110)	+4100	+20000
Washington	6-7	5-8-0	-0.4	7.5 (+118/-144)	+5500	+21000
Minnesota	8-5	10-2-1	+9.2	6.5 (-140/+110)	+13000	+60000
Michigan State	5-7	4-8-0	-6.8	5.5 (-125/+105)	+11000	+50000
Wisconsin	5-7	4-8-0	-0.5	5.5 (+136/-168)	+14000	+49000
UCLA	5-7	6-6-0	-6.8	5.5 (+124/-152)	+20000	+40000
Rutgers	7-6	7-5-1	+3.5	5.5 (-140/+115)	+50000	+80000
Maryland	4-8	4-8-0	-6.8	4.5 (-115/-105)	+30000	+100000
Northwestern	4-8	4-8-0	-8.5	3.5 (-130/+106)	+30000	+100000
Purdue	1-11	3-9-0	-24.2	3.5 (+180/-225)	+30000	+100000

That's the same Ohio State that Michigan has defeated four straight times (including three outright upsets).

Unfortunately, if they get to the Big Ten Championship Game, the Wolverines probably would have to knock off Ohio State, Penn State or Oregon.

Daunting? Yes. Impossible? No. After all, Michigan capped last season by upsetting Ohio State and Alabama — both as a double-digit underdog.

BEST BET TO WIN NATIONAL TITLE: OHIO STATE (+600)

Barring significant injuries that lead to an unforeseen collapse, the Big Ten's top three teams — Ohio State, Penn State and Oregon — are virtual locks to return to the College Football Playoff for a second straight year. Michigan also has a solid chance to join the party.

Among that quartet, though, only one appears to be built to go the distance. It's the same squad that went the distance last year: Ohio State.

Despite losing a bunch of talent (including their starting quarterback) to the NFL, the Buckeyes have reloaded on both sides of the ball. They also are led by a head coach who has successfully navigated the CFP's new 12-team gauntlet.

Speaking of head coaches, it's impossible to trust Penn State's James Franklin after countless failures on the biggest stages.

Similarly, aside from drubbing Franklin and the Nittany Lions in last year's Big Ten title game, Oregon coach Dan Lanning often has shrunk under the bright spotlight — including a 41-21 loss to Ohio State in the 2024 CFP quarterfinals.

WEEK 1 BEST BET: TEXAS AT OHIO STATE

The most-anticipated matchup in Week 1 happens to be a rematch of a 2024 College Football Playoff semifinal battle, which Ohio State won 28-14.

It also just might be a 2025 national championship game preview, as Ohio State and Texas entered summer as the top two consensus favorites to win it all.

With this nonconference battle taking place in Columbus, the defending champion Buckeyes understandably are a short 3.5-point favorite.

Don't bother taking (or laying) the points in what essentially is a 50-50 tossup. Instead, bank on a low-scoring game.

Not only are defenses usually ahead of offenses early in the season, but both teams had to replace several elite skill-position players. At the same time, both stop units figure to be among the best in the nation.

So bet on this one falling short of 50 total points.

PICK: UNDER 50.5 POINTS (-110)

PREVIEW

POWER 4

ACC

MATT JACOB

BEST WIN TOTAL BET: NORTH CAROLINA OVER 7.5 (+148)

During his tenure as head coach of the New England Patriots, Bill Belichick exceeded preseason expectations with stunning regularity … that is, when Tom Brady was on the field. With the legendary quarterback running the offense, Belichick and the Patriots topped their projected win total 14 times, came up short twice and pushed twice.

In Belichick's six years when Brady either wasn't on the roster or missed the season injured? The legendary coach beat his win total just once.

Spoiler alert: Brady won't be under center this fall when Belichick returns to the sidelines, this time as head coach at North Carolina.

For that reason alone, it's tempting to bet on the Tar Heels to fall short of their 2025 win total like some of my colleagues writing for this magazine have. It's also tempting because oddsmakers undoubtedly slapped a "Belichick tax" on North Carolina's over/under.

Then you look at UNC's schedule and see back-to-back September games against Charlotte and Richmond. You also see a season-ending stretch against Cal, Virginia, Syracuse, Stanford, Wake Forest, Duke, and North Carolina State.

One commonality those seven ACC rivals share? Lower win-total projections than the Tar Heels.

BEST BET TO WIN ACC: MIAMI (+420)

If you believe college football oddsmakers, the ACC is Clemson's to lose this year.

Not only are the Tigers an overwhelming favorite to successfully defend their 2024 league title, they're nearly an odds-on favorite.

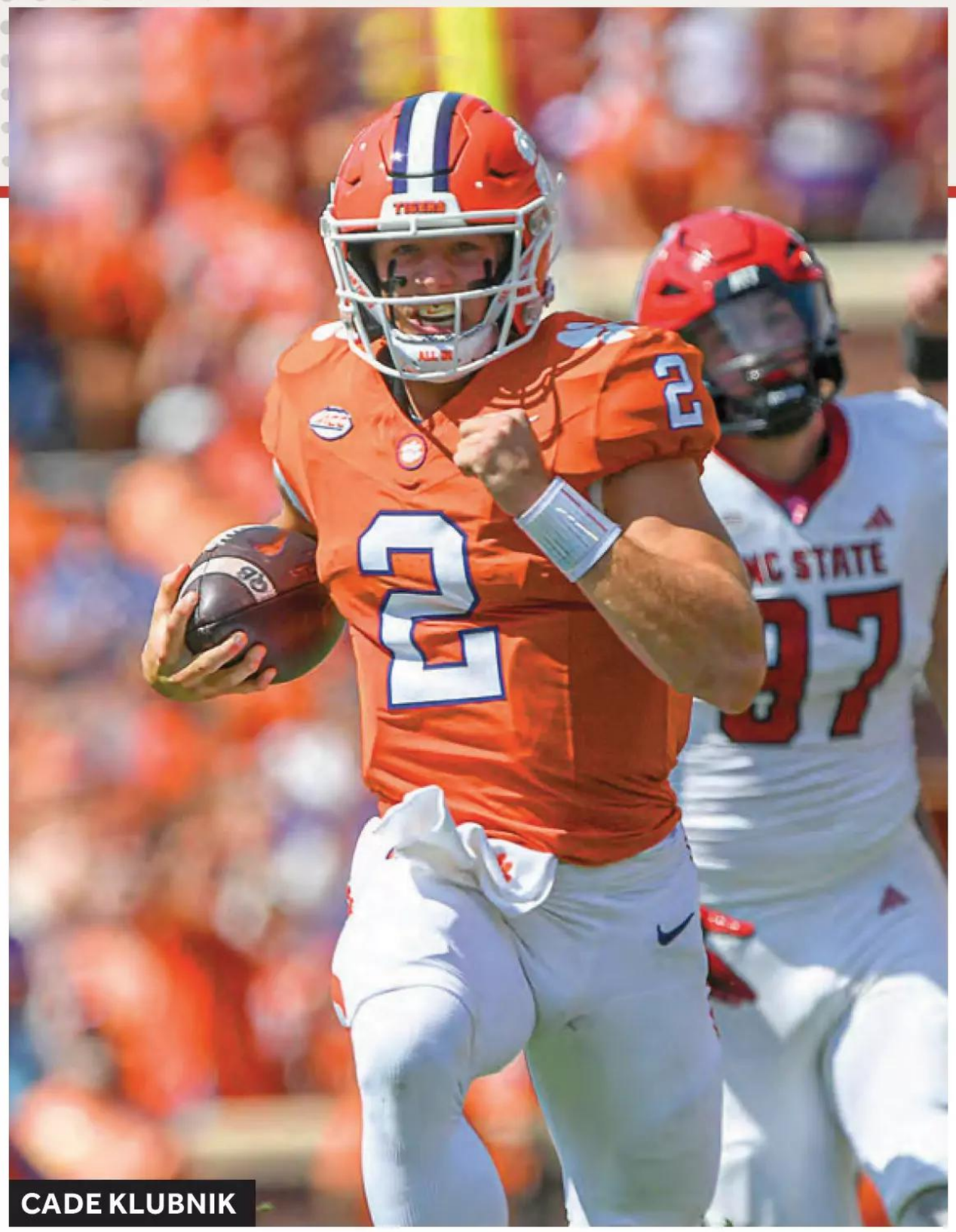
No surprise, of course, considering Clemson has won eight of the last 10 conference crowns.

On the flip side, the Miami Hurricanes joined the ACC in 2004 and have since claimed … zero conference titles.

Despite that reality — and despite having to replace a quarterback who was the top overall pick in this year's NFL Draft

BRYCE BAKER AND BILL BELICHICK

BOB DONNAN-IMAGN IMAGES



CADE KLUBNIK

KEN RUINARD-IMAGN IMAGES;

2025 ACC ODDS

TEAM	2024 W-L	2024 ATS	2024 MOV	2025 WIN TOTAL (O/U)	ACC CHAMP	CFP CHAMP
Clemson	10-4	6-8-0	+11.3	9.5 (-172/+140)	+125	+1400
Miami	10-3	6-7-0	+18.6	8.5 (-152/+124)	+420	+4400
Louisville	9-4	7-6-0	+12.4	8.5 (-142/+116)	+700	+8000
SMU	11-3	8-6-0	+14.4	8.5 (-114/-105)	+850	+10000
Georgia Tech	7-6	6-6-1	+3.3	7.5 (-125/+105)	+1300	+20000
Florida State	2-10	3-8-1	-12.6	7.5 (+184/-230)	+3000	+46000
North Carolina	6-7	2-10-1	+2.8	7.5 (+148/-176)	+4000	+100000
Duke	9-4	8-4-1	+1.8	6.5 (-140/+114)	+3000	+49000
Virginia Tech	6-7	6-7-0	+5.3	6.5 (+110/-135)	+3000	+60000
NC State	6-7	4-8-1	-1.6	6.5 (+118/-144)	+4100	+100000
Virginia	5-7	6-5-1	-6.1	6.5 (-104/-118)	+9000	+100000
Pittsburgh	7-6	7-6-0	+4.5	5.5 (-184/+148)	+3900	+55000
Syracuse	10-3	6-7-0	+4.9	5.5 (+100/-122)	+4300	+65000
Boston College	7-6	8-4-1	+4.4	5.5 (+116/-142)	+6500	+100000
California	6-7	6-7-0	+2.8	5.5 (-138/+112)	+6000	+100000
Wake Forest	4-8	3-7-2	-6.8	4.5 (-140/+114)	+23000	+100000
Stanford	3-9	4-7-1	-10.8	3.5 (+128/-158)	+30000	+100000

— the Hurricanes are the second choice behind Clemson to win the 2025 ACC championship.

History aside, this is where the betting value lies. Because while the Tigers have the edge in roster talent, Miami isn't far behind. In fact, one national recruiting outlet rated the Hurricanes' 2025 class 13th in the nation. Clemson's ranking: 32nd.

Unfortunately for fans, these teams won't square off in the regular season. However, a meet-up in the ACC Championship Game seems more likely than not. Should it transpire, Miami's odds to win will be far less than its preseason price of +420.

BEST BET TO WIN NATIONAL TITLE: CLEMSON (14/1)

It's been seven years since Clemson last won the national championship (its second in a three-year span from 2016-18).

And it's been 35 years since an ACC team other than Clemson or Florida State won it all.

In fact, Clemson and Florida State are responsible for six of the ACC's eight national titles (each have won three). The others belong to Georgia Tech (1990) and Maryland (1953).

So it's no surprise that the Tigers are the only ACC squad with national championship odds shorter than 30-to-1 (and one of just two whose price is shorter than 80-to-1).

The simple reality is this: No ACC team other than Clemson has a realistic shot to win it all.

What about its 16-to-1 odds? More than fair, especially since things would have to go horribly wrong for the Tigers not to reach the College Football Playoff for an eighth time (and second year in a row).

WEEK 1 BEST BET: NOTRE DAME VS. MIAMI

Miami gets an opportunity to make an immediate and emphatic statement when it welcomes Notre Dame to South Beach on Labor Day Weekend.

Alas, as of mid-June, the betting market wasn't siding with the Hurricanes, who opened as a slight home underdog against last year's national champion runner-up.

Don't be shocked, though, if the point spread flips in the days leading up to kickoff. It would be the correct move, too, as Miami's athleticism should be too much for an overhauled Notre Dame squad to deal with — particularly in hot, sticky late-summer conditions.

PICK: MIAMI ML (-102)

PREVIEW

POWER 4

BIG 12

MATT JACOB

BEST WIN TOTAL BET:
UTAH OVER 7.5 (-154)

No team in the Big 12 entered the 2024 season with more hype than Utah, whose projected win total of 9.5 matched Kansas State for highest in the conference.

Suffice to say, that forecast was a tad off: The Utes finished 5-7, the program's first sub-.500 campaign in a dozen years.

Considering that Utah has turned in back-to-back losing seasons just once in the last 35 years, history suggests that the team will bounce back in 2025.

Certainly, coach Kyle Whittingham did his part in the offseason by hitting the transfer portal hard — so hard that all five skill position players on the first-string offensive depth chart are newcomers.

That includes dual-threat quarterback Devon Dampier, who had 31 total touchdowns at New Mexico last season. Dampier will be charged with breathing life into an offense that last year averaged just 19.6 points per game against Big 12 foes.

One big plus for the Utes is a favorable schedule: The team's three toughest conference opponents — Texas Tech, Arizona State and Kansas State — all come to Salt Lake City.

BEST BET TO WIN BIG 12:
TEXAS TECH (+700)

Just how competitive was the Big 12 last season? Four teams finished tied atop the league standings at 7-2 (and another three went 6-3).

More of the same is expected in 2025, as half of the conference's 16 teams have projected win totals of 7.5 or 8.5. Among that group, six have Big 12 title odds ranging from +600 to +900.

One of the favorites: Texas Tech, which welcomes a class of newcomers that one national outlet ranked as the fifth-best in the country (higher than the likes of Ohio State, Michigan and Georgia).

Leading the newbies on the offensive side of the ball will be Behren Morton. The senior quarterback has amassed more than 5,000 passing yards and 42 touchdowns in 22 games as the Red Raiders' starter.

Morton and his teammates do have three difficult Big 12 road trips (Utah, Arizona State and Kansas State). However, none are back-to-back.

Otherwise, Texas Tech should be favored in every game, including when it travels to Houston and West Virginia.

BEHREN MORTON

RESE STRICKLAND-IMAGN IMAGES

ROCCO BECHT

TIM HEITMAN-IMAGN IMAGES

2025 BIG 12 ODDS

TEAM	2024 W-L	2024 ATS	2024 MOV	2025 WIN TOTAL (O/U)	BIG 12 CHAMP	CFP CHAMP
Arizona State	11-3	12-2-0	+10.4	8.5 (-110/-110)	+550	+11000
Kansas State	9-4	4-9-0	+7.5	8.5 (+100/-122)	+600	+12000
Texas Tech	8-5	7-5-1	+2.8	8.5 (-118/-104)	+700	+13000
BYU	11-2	8-4-1	+11.5	8.5 (+142/-176)	+1100	+20000
Utah	5-7	5-7-0	+2.9	7.5 (-154/+126)	+600	+12000
Baylor	8-5	9-4-0	+7.7	7.5 (+106/-130)	+700	+18000
Iowa State	11-3	8-6-0	+8.1	7.5 (+112/-138)	+1200	+29000
Kansas	5-7	5-7-0	+3.7	7.5 (+148/-184)	+1700	+60000
TCU	9-4	6-7-0	+0.7	6.5 (-162/+132)	+850	+16000
Cincinnati	5-7	4-7-1	+0.6	6.5 (+110/-134)	+2700	+95000
Colorado	9-4	9-4-0	+9.8	6.5 (+136/-168)	+2800	+65000
Houston	4-8	5-6-1	-8.9	5.5 (-200/+160)	+3000	+65000
West Virginia	6-7	5-7-1	-2.8	5.5 (+152/-188)	+5000	+100000
Arizona	4-8	2-10-0	+2.8	5.5 (+128/-158)	+5000	+100000
Oklahoma State	3-9	3-9-0	-8.4	5.5 (+124/-152)	+5500	+100000
UCF	4-8	5-7-0	+3.5	5.5 (-124/+102)	+6000	+100000

BEST BET TO WIN NATIONAL TITLE: TEXAS TECH (130/1)

It's been two decades since a Big 12 team last won a national championship. And that team (Texas) is now doing business in the SEC.

The last time a current Big 12 member won it all? You have to go back to 1990, when Colorado shared the title with Georgia Tech.

So while the conference is guaranteed at least one seat at the College Football Playoff table, it's doubtful that any Big 12 squad will be the last team standing in January.

How doubtful? No team in the league has shorter national championship odds than 100-to-1.

Then again, one Big 12 team will nab that golden ticket to the CFP. And that team will have an opportunity to shock the world.

Seeing that our money is on Texas Tech to win the conference and its automatic playoff berth, our money must also be on the Red Raiders to do the shocking.

WEEK 1 BEST BET: KANSAS ST. VS. IOWA ST.

Kansas State and Iowa State closed out the 2024 regular season against each other in the 108th all-time meeting. Now they're set for battle No. 109 — only this time in Dublin, Ireland, where the 2025 college football season kicks off on Aug. 23.

Although Iowa State has won the last two meetings in this rivalry (and five of the last six), oddsmakers see this one going the other way: Kansas State opened as a consensus 3.5-point favorite.

Yes, the Wildcats enter the season with slightly higher expectations. But QB Rocco Becht and the Cyclones have covered the spread in each of the last five matchups and nine of the last 11, with the underdog cashing eight times.

During this stretch, the Wildcats have defeated Iowa State by more than three points just twice.

PICK: IOWA STATE (+3.5, -110)

Best Bets Based On RECENT TRENDS

BY ANDY FENELON

Luke Fickell • Wisconsin

Luke Fickell was hired to change things at Wisconsin. As it turned out, he did, taking a boring-but-winning program to one that is currently non-competitive.

If there was a betting market available for the first coach fired in 2025 (the first odds should drop before Week 0 kicks off), the Badgers coach would be near or at the very top of the list.

But that's not the Wisconsin bet we're targeting here. Instead, it's the team's win total, which sits at an embarrassing 5.5 – one less than the 20-year low the Badgers were projected for in 2024 when they finished 5-7. In 2023, they had a win total of 8.5, but like last season, they missed hitting the Over by two games.

While it's only a two-year trend, Fickell has shown a confounding nature to underachieve. The Under has strong appeal here, especially when you consider the Badgers lost several key parts to the portal, are transitioning to a new offense, and own the nation's third-most difficult schedule.

Best bet: Wisconsin Under 5.5 wins (-164)

LIBERTY TO GO UNDEFEATED IN THE REGULAR SEASON (+700)

Over the last three decades, an average of one team per season has gone unbeaten in the regular season. The Flames have a chance to do it twice in three years.

Liberty's slim hopes for the College Football Playoff hinge on an unblemished resume. That's all the motivation needed for a squad that is just two years removed from going through a regular season undefeated.

In 2025, no team in the country has an easier slate of games than the Flames, who don't have any P4 opponents scheduled in non-conference play.

Jamey Chadwell's biggest challenge will be finding a new quarterback. The likely candidate is Coastal Carolina transfer Ethan Vasko, whose unique skillset as a runner and passer should play in Conference USA.

TEXAS A&M UNDER 7.5 WINS (+134)

While returning all five starters on the offensive line, Texas A&M is a team in transition on both sides of the ball. The Aggies lost their top five receivers, and on defense they will have to find a way to replace three game-wreckers who were taken in the first two rounds of the NFL draft.

The schedule does them no favors either. Besides the SEC gauntlet, they also play at Notre Dame and finish conference play with four of their last five on the road, including a date with Texas in Austin in the finale.

The Aggies have gone Under their win total in six straight seasons. Plus-money odds adds value to seven.

NEBRASKA UNDER 7.5 WINS (+110)

Nebraska hasn't hit the Over on its win total in eight years, missing by an average of 2.5 wins per season.

It might seem reasonable to believe this year could be different for the Cornhuskers, who finished 2024 bowl-eligible for the first time since 2016. Matt Rhule has a special quarterback in Dylan Raiola, and did a great job adding talent in the offseason.

However, the schedule still feels closer to seven wins than eight, and with history working against the 'Huskers, give me the Under at plus-money.

JEFF HANISCH-IMAGN IMAGES

EXPANDED CFP LESSONS from YEAR ONE

BY MICHAEL LEBOFF

College Football bettors were flying blind in 2024. Realignment, NIL, the transfer portal, and the expanded College Football Playoff turned the sport upside down, and bettors had to figure out how this confluence of change would impact their approach to wagering on the sport, especially in the futures market.

As we hurl toward Year 2 of this new era of college football, punters can apply what they learned from last season and use it to their benefit in 2025.

BUY THE POST-DEFEAT DIP

This is the most important lesson bettors can take from the first season with the expanded CFP. There is no better time to buy on an elite team than right after a loss.

Consider these three examples from 2024:

- Notre Dame's shocking two-point defeat to Northern Illinois in September caused everyone to write the Irish off, and their price skyrocketed in a season that ended with an appearance in the CFP title game.
- National champion Ohio State lost to Michigan at the end of the regular season, causing the Buckeyes' number to drift right before the playoff kicked off for them with a first-round matchup against Tennessee.
- Clemson opened the season with a lopsided loss to Georgia and was defeated two more times, but the Tigers made it into the 12-team CFP field thanks to winning the ACC.

So while the rest of the college football world is overreacting to a contender getting upset, bettors should zag and think about buying the dip.

Week 1 of 2025 features a handful of heavyweight matchups, and while everyone will be getting hyped about statement victories in the LSU vs. Clemson matchup or Notre Dame vs. Miami, savvy futures bettors will know the best course of action will be to hop on the bandwagon of the teams that lose.

THE LESSONS OF REALIGNMENT

Realignment completely changed how we now view win-loss records in college football. Before 2024, every loss felt like a death sentence for teams with playoff aspirations. But now, since the Power Four conferences are stacked, it will become more and more common for teams with two and three losses to be considered for the field.

There are just too many good teams in each Power Four conference to expect them to get through the season unblemished or with just a single loss.

ADAM CAIRNS/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

MONITOR MARKET OVERREACTIONS

While the path in the College Football Playoff is crucial, it can cause the market to overreact if an elite team is saddled with a tough draw. For example, take Ohio State.

The Buckeyes' loss to Michigan at the end of the 2024 regular season caused them to fall into the No. 8 seed, putting them on a path that included tilts with Tennessee, Oregon, and Texas before the championship game against Notre Dame.

Staring down a gauntlet, bettors began to write off Ohio State's chances to win the national title, thinking there was little chance the Buckeyes would emerge on the other side of that three-game stretch. Entering the CFP, FanDuel listed them at +500 to win it all, behind Oregon, Georgia and Texas.

That presented another good buying opportunity on a team that was one of the favorites to win the National Championship throughout the entire season.

GROUP OF 5 Party Crashers

Top value bets to make the CFP outside the Power 4 Conferences

BY MICHAEL LEBOFF

Blake Horvath • Navy

TOMMY GILLIGAN-IMAGN IMAGES

The new college football world we're living in has completely changed the landscape of the sport. The Power Four conferences are loaded, NIL and the transfer portal have turned the offseason into a soap opera, and the Group of Five feels like it's in its own universe, with 75 teams vying for one spot in the College Football Playoff.

Boise State was the lone G5 representative in last season's CFP, riding Ashton Jeanty to a 12-2 record with the team's only losses coming to Oregon (by three points) and Penn State in the postseason tournament.

In other words, the standard was set incredibly high by the Broncos, meaning you'll likely need to put together an historic season to beat out Boise State and the other 70-plus teams to get the Group of 5's invitation to the dance.

Here are three teams with the best value of pulling that off in 2025:

NAVY (18/1)

The AAC is going to be a beast in 2025 with Tulane, Memphis, Navy, Army, UTSA and South Florida all being priced in the single digits to win the conference. Of that bunch, Tulane will get the most hype – and deservingly so – but I'll pivot for a better price on a team that I am high on heading into the season.

Navy was one of the pleasant surprises in 2024, completely turning the program around with a 10-3 season and a win over Oklahoma in the Armed Forces Bowl.

Quarterback Blake Horvath, a monster for the Midshipmen in 2024, could be the Group of Five's biggest difference-maker, which has me believing Navy – helped by a relatively light schedule – could be the G5 team with the best resume at season's end.

SAN JOSE STATE (50/1)

The Spartans were better than expected in 2024, and another step forward in 2025 could have them on the radar for the College Football Playoff.

The SJSU defense took a hit in the offseason, but the upside of this up-tempo offense – led by quarterback Walker Eget – could soften that blow.

Boise State and UNLV are two of the favorites among the G5 teams to make the Playoff, but the Spartans avoid those two teams on the conference schedule, meaning they could face either of them in a win-and-in scenario in the MWC Championship in December.

Former Navy head coach Ken Niumatalolo had this team going in the right direction in his first year in San Jose, and with more experience in his system, the Spartans could be in store for bigger things in 2025.

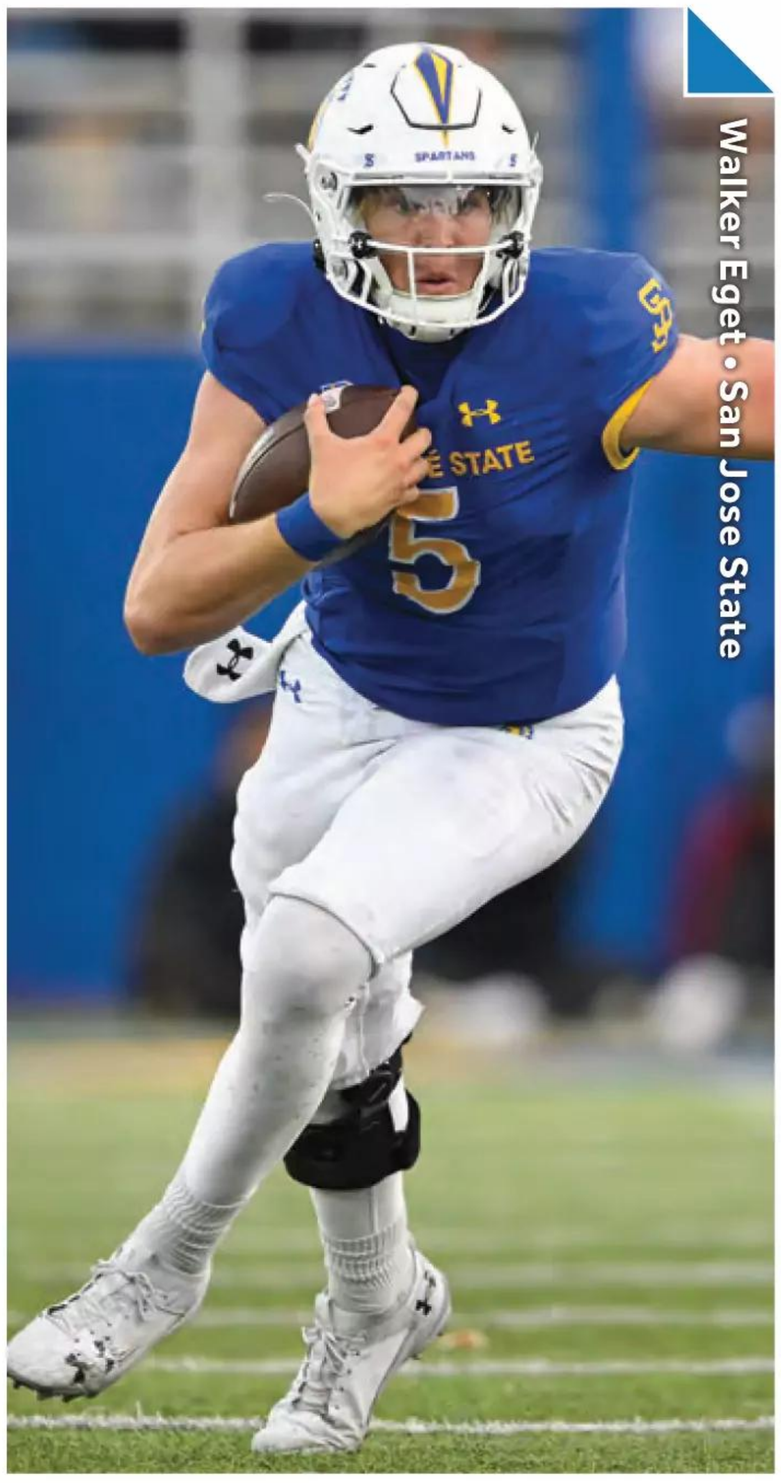
UTEP (100/1)

If you're looking for a longshot, the Miners could be a fun landing spot, and it's all because of the upside of QB Malachi Nelson.

A transfer from Boise State, Nelson immediately raises the ceiling for UTEP, and could be the most talented quarterback in Conference USA with Liberty's Kaidon Salter moving on to play for Deion Sanders at Colorado.

Head coach Scotty Walden and the Miners have a tough nonconference schedule, including a road game at Texas in Week 3. It won't be easy, but there is a path to the CFP with one defeat.

Perhaps it makes more sense to just grab the 13/1 on UTEP to win C-USA, but Nelson's upside really makes the Miners an intriguing longshot across the board.



Walker Eget • San Jose State

Scotty Walden and Malachi Nelson • UTEP

FROM LEFT: EAKIN HOWARD-IMAGN IMAGES; GABY VELASQUEZ/ EL PASO TIMES

PREVIEW

GROUP OF 5

AAC

BY MICHAEL LEBOFF

The AAC projects to be a gauntlet in 2025. Arguably the deepest conference in the Group of Five, it is headlined by Tulane, which is a +270 favorite to win the title game in December.

The Green Wave were expected to take a step back in 2024, but they put together a 9-5 campaign and went 7-1 in conference play in Jon Sumrall's first season in New Orleans. Tulane lost to Army in the AAC Championship last December.

Navy, another team that had a surprise performance in 2024, is the second favorite at +450, just ahead of Memphis (+500), UTSA (+600), South Florida (+700) and Army (+750),.

With six teams sitting between +200 and +750, the AAC figures to be wide open in 2025.

BEST BET TO WIN THE AAC:
TULSA (160/1)

Perhaps more than any other conference in college football this season, the AAC is going to be a slobberknocker. The teams at the top are all going to beat up on one another, which could leave the door open for an outsider to come in and stun everyone.

Tulsa fits that profile. The program has been in the college football wilderness for quite some time, but the Golden Hurricane went out and made an intriguing hire for their vacant head coach position.

Tre Lamb will come in and completely revamp the team's offensive system, adding some serious upside after a successful season with East Tennessee State.

Every season we see one coach make the leap from FCS to FBS and have instant success, and Lamb has a chance to do that in Tulsa. It's a lot to ask of Tulsa to contend in this conference, but we're getting a massive price on a team that could have a really high ceiling.

BEST WIN TOTAL BET:
TULANE UNDER 8.5 WINS (-105)

Tulane was superb in 2025, but this conference is going to be a bear, and the Green Wave have plenty of tough games on their docket, including Ole Miss, Duke, UTSA, Memphis and Army. This could be a really strong seven-win team in 2025.

BEST BET TO MAKE THE CFP:
NAVY (18/1)

I am a big Navy believer in 2025 and like backing them in this market rather than to win the conference.

You can count on the Midshipmen to be a well-oiled machine every year, but most seasons they lack the game-breaking talent to make any serious noise. That's not the case anymore, as quarterback Blake Horvath could be a Heisman sleeper in 2025.

DICKSON AGU • TULANE

DOUG ENGLE/GAINESVILLE SUN]

2025 AAC ODDS

TEAM	2024 W-L	2024 ATS	2024 MOV	2025 WIN TOTAL (O/U)	AAC CHAMP	CFP
Tulane	9-5	9-5-0	+14.4	8.5 (-115/-105)	+270	+790
Navy	10-3	9-4-0	+9.2	8.5 (-148/+120)	+450	+1800
Memphis	11-2	6-5-0	+11.8	8.5 (-106/-114)	+500	+820
UTSA	7-6	7-6-0	+3.1	7.5 (+104/-128)	+600	+2500
Army	12-2	9-4-0	+15.6	7.5 (-148/+120)	+750	+1600
South Florida	7-6	7-6-0	+2.4	6.5 (-105/-115)	+700	+3500
East Carolina	8-5	7-5-0	+4.7	6.5 (+124/-152)	+1600	+6500
North Texas	6-7	5-8-0	-0.6	6.5 (-115/-105)	+1800	+5500
FAU	3-9	4-8-0	-4.3	4.5 (+116/-142)	+7000	+10000
UAB	3-9	5-6-0	-8.1	4.5 (+110/-134)	+9500	+10000
Rice	4-8	5-6-0	-3.3	3.5 (-160/+130)	+7500	+10000
Temple	3-9	6-6-0	-15.8	3.5 (-112/-108)	+8500	+10000
Charlotte	5-7	6-6-0	-11.4	2.5 (-152/+124)	+10000	+10000
Tulsa	3-9	4-8-0	-17.5	3.5 (+142/-176)	+16000	+10000

C-USA

BY MICHAEL LEBOFF

Delaware and Missouri State have made the jump from FCS to Conference USA, while 2025 will be the final season before UTEP makes the move to the Mountain West.

Outside of realignment and the transfer portal, there were also some big coaching changes in C-USA over the winter. K.C. Keeler, who put Sam Houston State on the map, is now at Temple, while Rich Rodriguez hopped from defending champs Jacksonville State to West Virginia.

There's plenty of change all around C-USA, but one thing that seems to be constant is Liberty entering the season as the clear favorite. Although the Flames finished fourth in the conference last season, they are +140 to win it in Jamey Chadwell's third year.

Liberty is 21-5 under Chadwell, but they'll need to replace MVP Kaidon Salter, the 2023 league MVP who transferred to Colorado.

There is certainly a chance the Flames just run the show in C-USA like they did in 2023, but with Salter out of the picture, the door is open for a gate-crasher to come in and surprise.

BEST BET TO WIN C-USA:

MIDDLE TENNESSEE (+1500)

Derek Mason's first season in Murfreesboro was predictably bumpy, but the Blue Raiders should take a step forward in 2025. That will be the expectation, anyways.

Mason had a difficult job in Year 1, needing to rebuild a program after a 17-year run under Rick Stockstill. We'll draw a line through 2024 and back Mason's experienced roster to bounce back.

Liberty is clearly the class of this conference, but there's really not much of a gap between the other contenders and Middle Tennessee. Plus, the Blue Raiders have a manageable schedule.

BEST WIN TOTAL BET:

WESTERN KENTUCKY UNDER 7.5 (+100)

The Hilltoppers made it to the C-USA Championship Game last year, but they'll have a tough time replicating that performance after getting raided in the transfer portal and losing four players to the NFL, including CB Upton Stout, who was drafted by the 49ers in the third round.

BEST BET TO MAKE CFP:

LIBERTY (+1120)

I think there could be some intrigue in backing a team like UTEP in this market, but we'll keep things tidy and go with the Flames.

You'd need to run the table to have a chance to get into the College Football Playoff out of C-USA, and Liberty has as good of a shot to do it as anyone. They're among the most talented teams in the Group of 5, with a very soft schedule.

NICHOLAS VATTIATO • MIDDLE TENNESSEE

PETRE THOMAS-IMAGN IMAGES

2025 C-USA ODDS

TEAM	2024 W-L	2024 ATS	2024 MOV	2025 WIN TOTAL (O/U)	C-USA CHAMP	CFP
Liberty	8-4	3-9-0	+14.7	9.5 (+100/-122)	+140	+1120
W. Kentucky	8-6	7-7-0	+14.1	7.5 (-122/+100)	+410	+2800
Jacksonville St.	9-5	8-6-0	+1.5	6.5 (+138/-170)	+900	+4000
Lousiana Tech	5-8	8-5-0	+1.2	6.5 (+140/-172)	+950	+7000
UTEP	3-9	5-7-0	-3.7	5.5 (+122/-150)	+1300	+10000
FIU	4-8	8-4-0	-4.3	5.5 (+110/-134)	+1400	+8000
Delaware	9-2	6-6-0	+13.9	5.5 (+140/-172)	NA	NA
Sam Houston	10-3	7-6-0	-1.4	4.5 (-128/+104)	+1000	+8000
Middle Tenn.	3-9	3-9-0	-8.3	4.5 (-152/+124))	+1500	+8000
N.M. State	3-9	5-7-0	-9.0	4.5 (-124/+102)	+2600	+10000
Missouri St.	8-4	5-6-0	+4.7	4.5 (-115/-105)	NA	NA
Kennesaw St.	2-10	5-7-0	-5.8	3.5 (-144/+118)	+2900	+10000

PREVIEW

GROUP OF 5

MAC

BY MICHAEL LEBOFF

The Mid-American Conference is known as the most chaotic league in college football, but last year was chalky by MAC standards.

The Ohio Bobcats were not the outright favorite to win the conference title in 2024, but they were not very far off at +450, putting them right behind the team they defeated, Miami (+300), in the MAC Championship.

Ohio is among the favorites to win the conference again in 2025 with +300 odds, joined by Toledo (+260). Buffalo (+470), Miami (+650) and Bowling Green (+1000) in the top five on the betting board.

Will the chalk reign supreme again in 2025? Or will the MAC return to form and provide us with some carnage?

BEST BET TO WIN MAC:
CENTRAL MICHIGAN (22/1)

The MAC was always tough to project, but things have gotten even more complicated over the years with the transfer portal. Every winter, like clockwork, we see bigger programs raid the MAC (and other G5 teams) and take their best players, basically putting the entire conference in a constant rebuild.

That will leave the door open for a team like Central Michigan to surprise in Year 1 of the Matt Drinkall era. Drinkall heads to Mount Pleasant after serving in a variety of roles at Army. He should be well prepared for what's to come in the MAC, and he will inherit a program that is on pretty solid footing.

But the real kicker here is the schedule. The Chippewas don't play Miami or Ohio, and they won't play Toledo until the season finale. They have a brutal non-conference schedule against Pitt, Michigan and San Jose State, so you will likely be able to get an even bigger number on the Chips before league play begins in late September.

BEST WIN TOTAL BET:
BOWLING GREEN UNDER 6.5 (-184)

Eddie George takes over as head coach of Bowling Green after Scott Loeffler departed to become the new QB coach with the Philadelphia Eagles. And while George had success with Tennessee State in 2024, the Tigers were 15-18 in his first three seasons in Nashville. It'll take some time for George to get used to his new digs. MACtion isn't for everyone.

BEST BET TO MAKE CFP:
TOLEDO (22/1)

It would be very hard to imagine a MAC team in the playoff, but Toledo and QB Tucker Gleason could theoretically get there by upsetting Kentucky and Washington State en route to a perfect season. It would be a miracle, but there is a path.

TUCKER GLEASON • TOLEDO

MARK J. REBILAS-USA TODAY SPORTS

2025 MAC ODDS

TEAM	2024 W-L	2024 ATS	2024 MOV	2025 WIN TOTAL (O/U)	MAC CHAMP	CFP
Toledo	8-5	6-7-0	+5.1	8.5 (-118/-104)	+260	+2200
Ohio	11-3	9-5-0	+11.0	7.5 (+104/-128)	+300	+3500
Buffalo	9-4	8-5-0	+2.5	7.5 (-114/-106)	+470	+4000
Miami (Ohio)	9-5	7-7-0	+5.3	6.5 (+124/-152)	+650	+4000
Bowling Green	7-6	6-7-0	+5.5	6.5 (+148/-184)	+1000	+7000
N. Illinois	8-5	5-6-2	+6.0	6.5 (+138/-170)	+1300	+7000
C. Michigan	4-8	5-6-1	-7.1	5.5 (+130/-158)	+2200	+10000
W. Michigan	6-7	5-8-0	-2.4	4.5 (-162/+130)	+1300	+8000
E. Michigan	5-7	7-5-0	-2.0	4.5 (+104/-128)	+2000	+10000
Akron	4-8	6-6-0	-11.6	4.5 (+132/-162)	+2000	+2000
UMass	2-10	6-5-1	-13.0	4.5 (+148/-184)	+5500	+10000
Ball State	3-9	7-5-0	-14.8	3.5 (-120/-102)	+5500	+10000
Kent State	0-12	3-9-0	-30.2	1.5 (-170/+138)	+30000	+10000

MWC

BY MICHAEL LEBOFF

Last season, the Mountain West Conference established itself as the cream of the crop in the Group of 5, with Boise State representing the league in the College Football Playoff and not looking all that out of place against Penn State.

The Broncos are expected to be among the best teams in the Group of 5 in 2025 – they are the only preseason odds-on conference favorite (+198) in the FBS – but after losing dynamic RB Ashton Jeanty, don't expect them to just waltz their way to the CFP again.

BEST BET TO WIN MWC:
AIR FORCE (+1700)

It's going to be hard to unseat Boise State, which is coming off back-to-back conference titles and ranked ninth in the nation in returning production.

That said, the Broncos did lose Ashton Jeanty, who was arguably the most valuable player in the country in 2024. Jeanty's departure significantly lowers BSU's ceiling, which makes laying -130 an unappealing bet in a conference that has a handful of teams with terrific upside.

One of those teams is San Jose State, but the number to win the conference (+750) is a little short for us. So we'll instead land on Air Force at 17/1. The Falcons endured a down year in 2024, but they had a very young roster that improved significantly as the season progressed.

It will be difficult to usurp the throne from Boise State, but Air Force could be just as good, if not better, than most of the teams projected to be contenders.

UNLV and Fresno have new coaching staffs and lost plenty of production to the portal, while Colorado State saw all four of its all-conference players depart.

Stability is massive in today's college football landscape, and Air Force ticks that box.

BEST BET TO MAKE CFP:
SAN JOSE STATE (+5000)

The Spartans are a team to watch in 2025. They had a really strong showing in 2024, and head coach Ken Niumatalolo seemed to unlock this offense, giving them one of the highest ceilings in the Group of 5 in 2025. SJSU is a fine bet to win the conference at +750, but we'll highlight this price, too.

BEST WIN TOTAL BET:
UNLV UNDER 8.5 WINS (-118)

Maybe everything clicks for Dan Mullen and his transfer-heavy roster in Year 1 at UNLV, but there has just been too much change to look away from this bet.

UNLV lost 10 of its 11 all-conference players from 2024. An easy schedule will help, but this season has blow-up potential.

WALKER EGET • SAN JOSE STATE

EAKIN HOWARD-IMAGN IMAGES

2025 MWC ODDS

TEAM	2024 W-L	2024 ATS	2024 MOV	2025 WIN TOTAL (O/U)	MWC CHAMP	CFP
Boise State	12-2	7-7-0	+14.7	9.5 (-225/+180)	-110	+198
UNLV	11-3	8-6-0	+14.1	8.5 (-104/-118)	+500	+1800
San Jose St.	7-6	6-7-0	+1.5	7.5 (-110/-110)	+750	+5000
Fresno State	6-7	6-6-1	+1.2	6.5 (-134/+110)	+900	+3000
Colorado St.	8-5	7-5-1	-1.4	6.5 (+130/-158)	+1700	+5500
Hawaii	5-7	7-5-0	-3.7	5.5 (-154/+126)	+1600	+8000
Air Force	5-7	5-7-0	-4.3	5.5 (-142/+116)	+1700	+5000
San Diego St.	3-9	5-7-0	-8.3	4.5 (-106/-114)	+2900	+8000
Wyoming	3-9	6-6-0	-9.0	5.5 (+148/-184)	+2900	+8000
Utah State	4-8	4-7-0	-5.8	4.5 (+128/-158)	+4000	+10000
New Mexico	5-7	7-5-0	-4.5	3.5 (+114/-140)	+26000	+10000
Nevada	3-10	6-6-1	-5.7	3.5 (-124/+102)	+9000	+10000

PREVIEW

GROUP OF 5

SUN BELT

BY MICHAEL LEBOFF

The Sun Belt was bedlam in 2024, and there's no reason to believe it'll be anything different this season.

After five schools introduced new head coaches last year, three more will do the same in 2025, including defending champion Marshall, which let head coach Charles Huff walk to Southern Miss after leading the Thundering Herd to their first conference title since 2014.

You just never know what's going to happen next in the Fun Belt, which is what makes it such a fun conference to handicap.

James Madison is the nominal favorite to win the league at +320, but the Dukes have plenty of company at the top of the board. Texas State, Louisiana, Georgia Southern and South Alabama all have odds of +750 or shorter.

The middle of the board is also packed with six teams sitting between +1000 and +2000. Georgia State is the biggest long shot to win the conference at +4800.

BEST BET TO WIN SUN BELT:
ARKANSAS STATE (+25/1)

It is tough to trust the chalk in the Sun Belt. There's just way too much chaos and variance to feel comfortable paying up for a team like James Madison or South Alabama. Weird stuff happens in this conference.

In this environment, it makes sense to hunt for a long shot with a high ceiling. That sounds a lot like Arkansas State.

The Red Wolves have one of the most thrilling G5 quarterbacks. Jaylen Raynor can beat you through the air or on the ground, and if he cuts back on the mistakes, he should turn some heads at Power 4 schools.

With Raynor under center, the Red Wolves have as much upside as anybody in this conference. They just need the defense to improve.

BEST BET TO MAKE CFP:
ARKANSAS STATE (80/1)

James Madison could be a trendy play in this market, but the price is too short on a team that would likely need to run the table. Instead, we'll stick with the Red Wolves at a massive price.

Arkansas State will need everything to go right, but Butch Jones has things pointing in the right direction in Jonesboro and he's got a serious playmaker at quarterback.

BEST WIN TOTAL BET:
SOUTHERN MISS OVER 4.5 (-168)

Things went off the rails for Southern Miss in 2025, but Huff should stabilize things in Year 1. He's bringing several of his players over from Marshall and should reinvigorate the program after a 1-11 season.

JAYLEN RAYNOR • ARKANSAS STATE

MICKEY WELSH-USA TODAY SPORTS

2025 SUN BELT ODDS

TEAM	2024 W-L	2024 ATS	2024 MOV	2025 WIN TOTAL (O/U)	SUN BELT CHAMP	CFP
James Madison	9-4	7-6-0	-12.8	8.5 (+116/-142)	+320	+1300
Texas State	8-5	6-7-0	+12.0	7.5 (+118/-144)	+650	+1800
Louisiana	10-4	7-7-0	+6.8	7.5 (-114/-106)	+700	+2500
Georgia Southern	8-5	8-4-1	+0.4	7.5 (+108/-132)	+700	+3500
South Alabama	7-6	6-7-0	+9.2	6.5 (-138/+112)	+750	+3000
Old Dominion	5-7	6-6-0	0.0	5.5 (-178/+146)	+1000	+7000
Troy	4-8	6-6-1	-2.4	5.5 (-122/+100)	+1300	+8000
App State	5-6	4-6-1	-6.3	5.5 (-140/+114)	+1500	+3500
Coastal Carolina	6-7	5-8-0	-2.9	5.5 (+108/-132)	+1700	+8000
Marshall	10-3	11-2-0	+8.8	5.5 (-102/-120)	+2000	+8000
Arkansas State	8-5	6-7-0	-6.3	5.5 (+144/-178)	+2500	+8000
Southern Miss	1-11	4-8-0	-22.5	4.5 (-168/+136)	+2600	+8000
UL Monroe	5-7	6-6-0	-7.8	4.5 (-106/-114)	+3100	+10000
Georgia State	3-9	2-8-2	-10.0	3.5 (+102/-120)	+4800	+10000

2025 BEST AND WORST OF FOOTBALL MEDIA

CFP/GETTY IMAGES)

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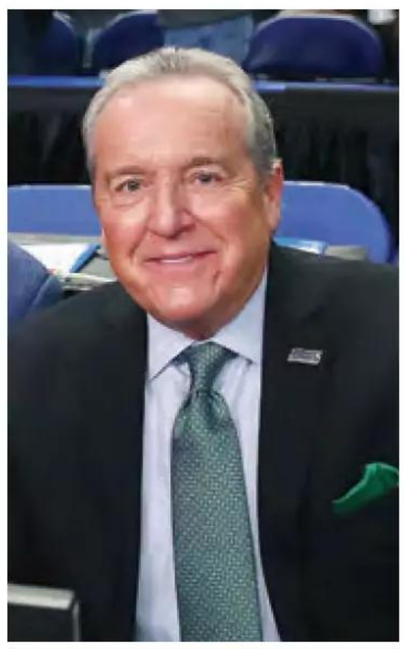

BRAD NESSLER

AL MICHAELS

5 Best Football Broadcasters!

BY MATT JACOB

What do football fans want from a broadcaster every time they tune in to a game? Simple: a pleasant voice, knowledge of the game, genuine passion and some occasional humor.

Here are the top five national football broadcasters who check those boxes better than any of their colleagues — and thus elevate the football watching experience, regardless of the score.

1. IAN EAGLE (CBS, NFL)

The golden rule of sports broadcasting: "It's about the game, not you." Unfortunately, many veterans of the industry abandon this edict as their careers advance. Not Ian Eagle.

The ultimate pro's pro, Eagle never forgets to check his ego at the broadcast booth door. As a result, NFL on CBS viewers are consistently treated to the perfect mix of insight, excitement and levity for 60 minutes — no matter if it's a Jaguars-Browns Week 2 snoozer or an intense Bills-Chiefs playoff clash.

2. KEVIN HARLAN (CBS, NFL)

Some broadcasters are so buttoned-up and robotic that it seems like they squeeze the life out of their personality whenever they knot their tie. Kevin Harlan is the complete opposite.

Whether doing TV for CBS or radio for Westwood One, Harlan brings an everyman enthusiasm and wit to everything he calls — be it a last-second Hail Mary or a wayward squirrel scampering toward the end zone.

The best compliment one could pay Harlan: He's a first-ballot "I'd love to watch a game at a bar with this guy" Hall of Famer.

3. GUS JOHNSON (FOX SPORTS, COLLEGE FOOTBALL)

It's a familiar refrain among sports fans when the final score is in doubt and the clock is ticking toward zero: "It doesn't get any better than this!"

Actually, it does … if Gus Johnson is calling the action.

The king of the crescendo, Johnson first burst onto the national scene doing college basketball, delivering some of the most legendary calls in March Madness history. Years ago, he branched out to college football and is now the lead voice for Fox's marquee games.

Yes, Johnson can be a bit mundane when the game itself is mundane. But when a big play is made — particularly late — he still meets the moment better than any of his peers.

4. BRAD NESSLER (CBS, COLLEGE FOOTBALL)

When the great Verne Lundquist turned off his college football mic for the final time nearly a decade ago, he left some enormous shoes to fill.

Enter Brad Nessler, who defied the "You never want to be the guy to replace a legend" axiom by leaving a secure gig with ESPN to become CBS' new voice for SEC football.

Nessler's calming voice, nonpartisan professionalism and meat-and-potatoes delivery made for a seemingly impossible smooth transition.

Even as he approaches 70, Nessler remains sharp, enthusiastic and capable of raising his game when the game itself requires it.

5. AL MICHAELS (PRIME VIDEO, NFL)

Has Al Michaels lost a little off his fastball in recent years? Yes. Are his best days behind him? Yes. Does any of this diminish the enjoyment of listening to Uncle Al call a game? No.

Simply put, the man is a national treasure. And at a time when legends of Michaels' era are signing off for good, it's important to appreciate and celebrate greatness while we still can.

Just a bit outside: Kevin Burkhardt (CBS, NFL); Spero Dedes (CBS, NFL); Joel Klatt (Fox, college football); Greg Olsen (CBS, NFL); Dave Pasch (ESPN, college football)

FROM LEFT: JEREMY SMITH/SPECIAL TO NORTHJERSEY.COM; KIRBY LEE-USA TODAY SPORTS; KIRBY LEE-IMAGN IMAGES; BILL WIPPERT/NCAA PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES; KIRBY LEE-USA TODAY SPORTS

TONY ROMO

JOE BUCK

GARY DANIELSON

KIRK HERBSTREIT

PETROS PAPADAKIS

5 Worst Football Broadcasters

BY MATT JACOB

Some have voices that sound worse than sharp nails dragging across a chalkboard. Some have less personality than a doorknob. And some are more annoying than the relative who talks politics at family gatherings.

We're talking, of course, about those football broadcasters who routinely wear out mute buttons each and every autumn.

Here are the five biggest offenders to our ears.

1. TONY ROMO (CBS, NFL)

From the moment he transitioned from the field to the booth, Tony Romo has been the quintessential love-him-or-hate-him analyst. Clearly, we fall in the latter camp.

While Romo's penchant for accurately "predicting" plays pre-snap was innovative in the beginning, the schtick long ago ran its course. Same goes for his "I'm a fan just like you!" excitement level (which seems more phony with each passing season).

These days, Romo comes across as a know-it-all whose post-play analysis often carries more style than substance.

2. JOE BUCK (ESPN, NFL)

As ESPN's voice of Monday Night Football, Joe Buck reportedly pulls down as much as $15 million a year. Yet when he calls a game, he gives off the vibe of someone earning minimum wage.

It's always been this way with Buck, whether he's in an MLB or NFL booth: Even when the drama is at its peak, his voice projects about as much pizzazz as a supermarket clerk asking for a price check over the loudspeaker.

Is Buck a terrible broadcaster? No, he's just a boring broadcaster — which is akin to calling an athlete lazy.

3. GARY DANIELSON (CBS, COLLEGE FOOTBALL)

Gary Danielson is not on this list because he's incapable of dissecting Xs and Os in an articulate manner. He's on this list because he's incapable of being objective.

From his nearly two decades as CBS' lead analyst for SEC games to the last two seasons as the network's lead analyst for the Big Ten, Danielson has always played favorites — and blatantly so.

Rest assured, if an SEC (or now Big Ten) juggernaut is in trouble against an underdog and Danielson is on the call, his bias toward said juggernaut will seep through the broadcast.

4. KIRK HERBSTREIT (ESPN, COLLEGE FOOTBALL; PRIME VIDEO, NFL)

There was a time when Kirk Herbstreit was an enjoyable listen. He provided unique insights, succinct post-play analysis and (most importantly) was an objective straight shooter.

Alas, those days are gone. Now ESPN's longtime No. 1 college football analyst appears to be more enthralled with Kirk Herbstreit, the brand, than the action on the field.

Not only is Herbstreit unable to rein in his arrogance (or hide his indifference), but that straight-shooter trait has vanished — especially on college football broadcasts. He openly shills for the most prominent programs, with zero compunction.

5. PETROS PAPADAKIS (FOX, COLLEGE FOOTBALL)

Petros Papadakis' name might not ring a bell. However, if you've watched a second-tier college football game on Fox — especially when the Pac-12 was in existence — you undoubtedly know his voice.

You also undoubtedly have a few empty ibuprofen bottles and worn-out earplugs scattered about the house.

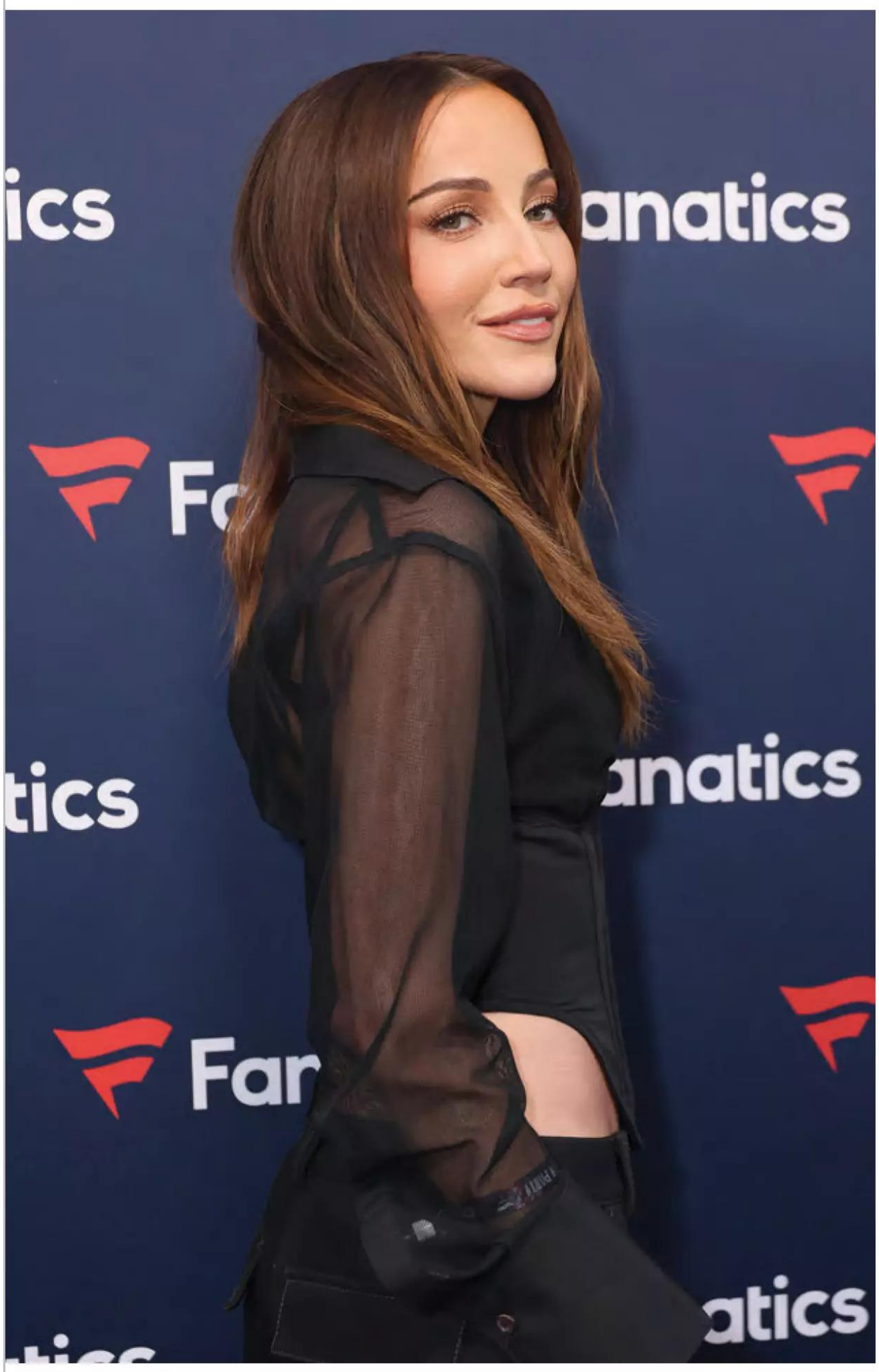
And if you haven't heard Papadakis call a game? Consider yourself lucky … and pray that luck doesn't run out.

The rest of the worst: Tiki Barber (CBS, NFL); Tom Brady (Fox, NFL); Cris Collinsworth (NBC, NFL); Sean McDonough (ESPN, college football); Beth Mowens (ESPN, college football)

FROM LEFT: MATT DAYHOFF/JOURNAL STAR; CHARLES LECLAIRE-USA TODAY SPORTS; ADAM CAIRNS/COLUMBUS DISPATCH; JAMES BLACK/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES; GREG NELSON /SPORTS ILLUSTRATED VIA GETTY IMAGES

7 Hottest Women In Football Media

BY AUSTIN PERRY



KAY ADAMS

Let's make one thing perfectly clear:

KAY ADAMS IS THE QUEEN OF FOOTBALL HOTTIES.

The former Good Morning Football host has been turning guys on social media into puddles for close to a decade now, and the 39-year-old is showing no signs of slowing down.

What sets Adams apart from her peers (aside from her insanely good looks) is her love of the game and down-to-earth personality; you can tell she would be just as comfortable shooting the breeze with you and your boys at the bar as she is interviewing some of the best players in the NFL.

Adams does her thing on the "Up & Adams Show" podcast, talking ball – and flirting – with stars both in and out of the NFL. And, of course, when she's not dissecting the game, she's turning heads by showing off a little skin on social media.

Make no mistake about it, Adams knows EXACTLY what she is doing. The playful attitude and "Girl Next Door" vibes definitely belie just how fine she knows she is, and we are thankful for it all the same.

Salute to you, Kay Adams. You're the best in the game right now and deserving of top honors on this list of the seven hottest women in football media.

ERIN ANDREWS, FOX SPORTS SIDELINE REPORTER

As one of the pioneers of the "smokeshow sideline reporter" movement, Erin Andrews can be seen as a veteran of the game, but don't let her experience fool you – she hasn't lost an ounce off her fastball.

Andrews first started heating up sidelines in 2004 for ESPN, meaning she's been in the game for more than two decades.

When you've been at it for 20-plus years and still look as fine as Andrews does, you deserve to be in the short list of football baddie royalty.

ANNA WEBBER/GETTY IMAGES

ERIN ANDREWS

LAURA RUTLEDGE

LAURA RUTLEDGE, ESPN HOST

If Kay Adams is the reigning queen of football hotties, Laura Rutledge is certainly the duchess.

The fact that Rutledge was named Miss Florida – a state known for its fair share of baddies – before she even stepped foot on a sideline more than qualifies her to be on this list.

The blonde bombshell puts in work in both the college and NFL ranks, making her an impressive double threat in the industry.

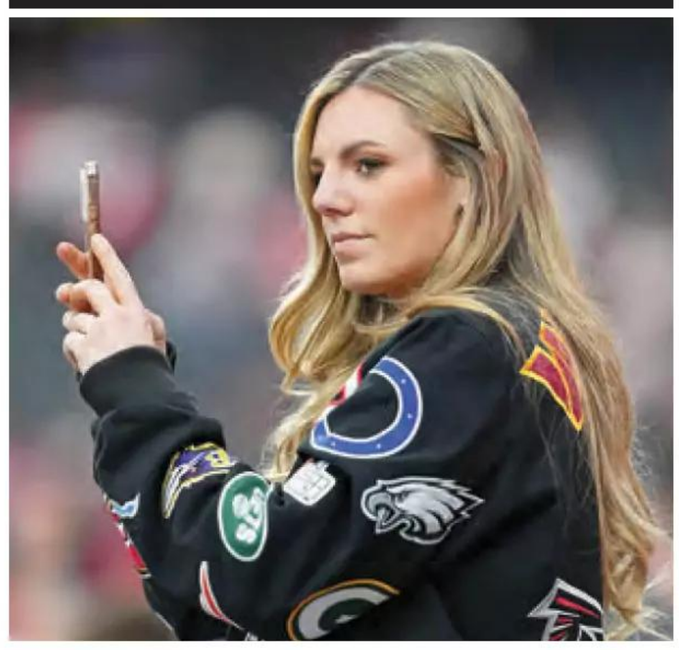
MELANIE COLLINS

MELANIE COLLINS, CBS SIDELINE REPORTER

The insanely hot Melanie Collins looks like a Victoria Secret model who stole some media grunt's credentials and snuck onto an NFL sideline. But that's far from the case, as this knockout knows as much football as anyone.

Oh, and make sure you check out her Instagram and thank me later. There's plenty of, ahem, "content" on there to keep you occupied until the NFL season rolls around in September.

ANNIE AGAR



ANNIE AGAR, NFL SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER

Being hot, funny, and knowing ball is a rarity, but Annie Agar checks all three boxes with plenty of room to spare.

The Bally Sports correspondent and social media darling uses her unique blend of humor and football knowledge to draw us in with her viral videos and then – BAM!! – you're sticking around her Instagram page liking bikini pics.

I swear that has to be some form of entrapment, but who the hell cares.

MOLLY McGRATH

MOLLY McGRATH, ESPN SIDELINE REPORTER

Saturdays in the Fall have been a whole lot hotter recently with Molly McGrath roaming the sidelines of some of our favorite college stadiums.

McGrath should be viewed as somewhat of a prodigy, as she's been in the sideline reporter game since 2009, which you would never tell by looking at her.

Though she's a bonafide baddie, McGrath also has the drive to be one of the best in the business. That was perfectly apparent in the 2023 viral video of her sprinting in heels to get a post-game interview, showing she will do whatever it takes to get a soundbite.

CHARISSA THOMPSON

CHARISSA THOMPSON, FOX SPORTS AND AMAZON PRIME VIDEO HOST

We are closing this list off with another legend of the game similar to Erin Andrews, the incomparable Charissa Thompson. It's only fitting, then, that Thompson and Andrews are good friends who co-host a podcast called Calm Down.

Thompson got her big break as one of the sideline reporters during the inaugural season of the Big Ten Network, and the leggy blonde hasn't looked back since.

At 43, Thompson looks better than most football baddies nearly 20 years her junior, proving to be one of the rare examples of getting hotter with age.

CLCOKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: TROY TAORMINA-USA TODAY SPORTS; KYLE TERADA-USA TODAY SPORTS; KIRBY LEE-IMAGN IMAGES (2); KYLE TERADA-USA TODAY SPORTS

1st Round	2nd Round	Sweet 16	Elite 8	Final 4

1 Stephen A. Smith
16 Jay Glazer
8 Tony Romo
9 Robert Griffin III
5 Craig Carton
12 Erin Andrews
4 Dan Orlovsky
13 Kay Adams
6 Mike Greenberg
11 Gary Danielson
3 Ryan Clark
14 Joel Klatt
7 Tom Brady
10 Mina Kimes
2 Skip Bayless
15 Rece Davis
1 Mel Kiper Jr.
16 Peter Schrager
8 Nick Saban
9 Rodney Harrison
5 Cris Collinsworth
12 Charissa Thompson
4 Dov Kleiman
13 Jac Collinsworth
6 Pablo Torre
11 Darren Rovell
3 Clay Travis
14 Emmanuel Acho
7 Urban Meyer
10 Chris Simms
2 Chris "Mad Dog" Russo
15 Chris Fowler

THE SPUN

The 64 Most Annoying People in Football Media

Final 4	Elite 8	Sweet 16	2nd Round	1st Round
				Nick Wright 1
				Al Michaels 16
				Desmond Howard 8
				Greg Olson 9
				Joe Buck 5
				Joy Taylor 12
				Rex Ryan 4
				Pam Oliver 13
				Jim Rome 6
				Adam Scheffer 11
				Pat McAfee 3
				PFT Commenter 14
				Terry Bradshaw 7
				Gus Johnson 10
				Colin Cowherd 2
				Jim Nantz 15
				Kirk Herbstreit 1
				Mike Tirico 16
				Bill Simmons 8
				Tony Dungy 9
				Todd McShay 5
				Annie Agar 12
				Danny Kanell 4
				Mike Florio 13
				Keyshawn Johnson 6
				Ian Rapoport 11
				LeSean McCoy 3
				Dan "Big Cat" Katz 14
				Michael Irvin 7
				Troy Aikman 10
				Paul Finebaum 2
				Brad Nessler 15

Scan for the 2025 Most Annoying People in Football Media Bracket

'Most Annoying' Champion

BY MATT JACOB

STEPHEN A. SMITH

SKIP BAYLESS

In a field of 64 media personalities, Stephen A. Smith — quite frankly — was a deserving winner in 2024

What can we say about Stephen A. Smith that hasn't already been said ad nauseum? The cacophonous ESPN talking (and talking and talking) head is obnoxious. He's a blowhard. He's an egomanic.

And he's also a winner … of The Spun's 2024 Most Annoying People in Football Media bracket.

Smith outlasted a field of 64 fellow blabbermouths, ultimately claiming last year's crown by taking down his former "First Take" partner in (ear) crime Skip Bayless in the championship round — although it was hardly a blowout.

After both finalists earned at least 70% of the vote in knocking off their first five media foes, their head-to-head battle for annoyance supremacy was a nailbiter, with The Spun readers giving Smith the edge 53% to 47%.

"Most annoying people in football media – that's what this is about? I don't know how I ended up on this list, but let me say a couple of things," Smith said on his podcast when the bracket was first released, not knowing at the time he'd romp through to the finals. "No. 1, The Spun, your list is trash. Your bracket is trash.

"First of all, how the hell do you have Charissa Thompson on that list? She's gorgeous, she's smart, she's good people, she's my friend. Who does she annoy? Really? C'mon now. You wanna throw Skip Bayless up there along with myself? Alright. That's just haterade. Alright. Feel free. I know you all love me. You certainly talk about me enough."

Fittingly, both Smith and Bayless were No. 1 seeds in their respective quadrants of the NCAA Tournament-style bracket, and they were joined in the Final Four by another windbag … er, No. 1 seed … Nick Wright of Fox Sports 1.

The other Final Four slot? That went to a No. 3 seed: first-ballot Hall of Fame hot-take loudmouth Chris "Mad Dog" Russo.

The 'Dog advanced to the Final Four by running roughshod over media personalities from virtually every major network. In order, Russo took out Rodney Harrison (No. 14 seed), Brad Nessler (No. 11), Shannon Sharpe (No. 2) and Colin Cowherd (No. 1).

Smith defended Cowherd before the voting commenced, calling the Fox Sports host "one of the greatest radio hosts you'll ever see … a treasure and a tribute to this industry."

One thing we learned from the 2024 "Most Annoying" competition was that the selection committee crushed it. Among the 32 first-round matchups, only eight resulted in upsets — and only three of those were significant.

In all, the Elite Eight comprised four No. 1 seeds, three No. 2s, and one No. 3.

So what will happen in 2025 when The Spun runs back its 64 Most Annoying People in Football Media bracket? The answer is in your hands. So scan the adjacent QR code and cast your ballot online.

Our prediction? Let's just say if there was a sportsbook willing to take our action, we'd wager heavily on a Smith-Bayless championship rematch. Both are going to be near-impossible to beat — unless, of course, they come down with a case of laryngitis.

And wouldn't that be music to our ears.

FROM TOP: KIRBY LEE-IMAGN IMAGES; IAN MADDOX FOR THE WASHINGTON POST VIA GETTY IMAGES

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